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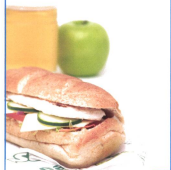
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CHOICE's New Year resolutions

Welcome to the first CHOICE for 2006. We're looking forward this year to giving you all the information you need to shop smart and avoid the rip-offs. We'll be investing more in our product tests than ever before. And remember that it's all independent — we never accept freebies or advertising from suppliers.

Is losing weight part of your plans for 2006? It usually comes near the top of the list of New Year resolutions, and it seems there's always a miracle pill on offer to help you. Do any recent weight-loss products live up to the hype?

The very first CHOICE, back in April 1960, reported on 'slimming cures'. With the benefit of hindsight we're glad we recommended not using amphetamines and plastic suits... But while some of the magic cures may be different in 2006, the promises are remarkably similar: it's easy, it's quick, it's scientifically proven, it's your turn this summer. Our report on weight loss products (page 8) shows the reality is very different — the scientific evidence doesn't support the claims being made.

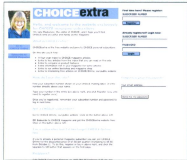
One of the problems in this area is the lack of effective market regulation from the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The TGA has a lousy track record for taking consumer issues seriously. It's supposed to be an independent agency, but is 100% funded by the industry it regulates — and it shows. So in 2006 we'll again be fighting to ensure the agencies that are supposed to protect consumers really do their job.



Peter Kell
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Consumers'
Association

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

www.CHOICEextra.com.au



The free website exclusive to CHOICE magazine subscribers, with a four-year index and links to many articles online.

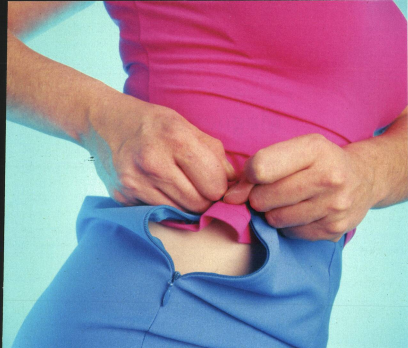
Look out for the  symbol in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info on CHOICEextra. This month you can use our 'compare-a-dishwasher' tool to help find a model that best meets your needs.

To use this free website you'll need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the number directly above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.



All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

Call
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Photo: Getty

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A small step in the right direction

To encourage companies to improve their employees' working conditions in factories around the world, continued pressure from consumers is needed. "Consumer concern is ultimately what companies care about, and what will make the difference," said Annie Delaney of Fair Wear, an organisation campaigning for clothing workers.

Earlier this year, **NIKE** released names and addresses of over 700 contract factories creating its goods globally, in part to provide greater transparency for consumers. For many years, **NIKE** has been accused of using contract factories that provide sweatshop conditions for their workers, such as below living wages, enforced overtime, unsafe working practices, cases of sexual harassment and lack of union rights.

We asked experts whether the list is meaningful. Tim Connor, Labour Rights Advocacy Co-ordinator from Oxfam Australia, said, "It's an important, useful step to take." Anita Chan, Senior Research Associate on Contemporary China at Canberra's Australian National University, thinks it'll only be useful if non-government organisations (NGOs) use it to investigate factories.

Currently **NIKE** audits its contract factories itself (in 2004 it audited 291 of the 700-plus), with the Fair Labor Association (FLA), a US non-profit organisation (of which **NIKE** is a founding member) auditing 5%, to see if they comply with **NIKE**'s code of conduct. This "outlines [the] expectations for contract factories around labour and environment, safety and health". The company admits many factories making its products don't comply with it.

In its FY04 Corporate Responsibility Report, **NIKE** outlines the challenges in identifying, analysing and resolving non-compliance with the code as well as its future plans for dealing with this area (to read the report go to www.nike.com/nikebiz/nikebiz.html?na=29&item=fy04).

Surprisingly, enforcing the code may not always mean better working circumstances. For example, NGO China Labor Watch reported that in 2002 when **NIKE**'s code of conduct was introduced to a factory making **NIKE** shoes in Dongguan City, the intensity of work increased — workers had to do the same workload in fewer hours to satisfy overtime stipulations.

So what can be done to ensure sports shoes and apparel are made in a way that's fair? Oxfam Australia says **NIKE**'s next step should be to work with unions (in countries that allow them) and human rights organisations to help change the power relationship in the factories, as well as provide workers with a living wage. However, **NIKE**'s Corporate Responsibility Report says it doesn't support the living wage approach to payment, claiming "market forces" and productivity determine earnings.

Kate Meyer, Communications Manager for **NIKE** Pacific, says it's difficult to define a living wage. Annie Delaney from Fair Wear defines it in part as a wage providing "...sufficient income for a family to meet basic needs and improve their standard of living". Many contract factory workers in countries such as China and Indonesia still don't earn enough to meet their basic needs.

There's a long way to go, but **NIKE**'s move is at least a start. And since **NIKE** took this step, two other leading brands, **LEVI STRAUSS** and **PUMA**, have followed suit by also releasing the addresses of all their suppliers. Let's hope more companies follow. To find out more, go to www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/nike/action/index.html or www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/nike/action/taehwa.html.

Magnetic washing?

A new take on laundry balls has hit the market. The **LIFE MIRACLE Magnetic Laundry System** (two magnetic balls, in effect) is claimed to be free of chemicals, safer for your health and the environment, hypo-allergenic, reusable, long-lasting, convenient, easy to use ... and could save you a small fortune in detergent. Sounds too good to be true? Unfortunately, it is — we found it didn't get washing any cleaner than plain water.

These reusable magnetic laundry balls are claimed to clean your clothes "with nature's most powerful force". While magnetism can be powerful, we'd say the force at work here is water rather than "the power of renewable magnetic force". At least that's what our test results suggest.

When we tested the balls — in a fully loaded front-loading washing machine on its warm (40°C) and hot (60°C) water programs — they achieved very similar soil removal scores to the same load washed in plain water at the same temperatures: below 45% on average. In comparison, the average soil removal score for an equally dirty load washed in the same machine with our standard detergent was around 80%.

LIFE MIRACLE PRODUCTS (www.hotofftheshelf.com.au) strongly disagreed with our findings when we asked for a response. It objected to the test method we used, but we're confident that it provides a good basis for comparing these balls with other wash scenarios in a realistic way. The company also suggested that our use of a reflectometer to determine precisely how clean a product washes clothes "sets up an unfair bias in favour of chemicals", as many detergents contain optical brighteners, which make clothes appear cleaner.

UPDATE

BARBECUES

CHOICE, December 2005

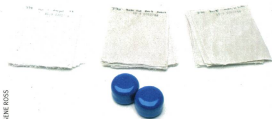
The **BEEFEATER Discovery Series 4 Burner** (which was in the *What to buy* list) has been discontinued sooner than expected. It's been replaced by a new model with the same name and similar features, but with a side burner included; recommended retail price is \$839 (the tested model was \$714).

GENE RIGGS



However, our reflectometer filters out UV light to stop the effect of optical brighteners.

In addition the company says clothes washed in detergent may not be considered 'clean' by people with chemical sensitivities. We agree: clothes washed the traditional way, with detergent, may still contain traces of chemicals after the wash. However, if you're happy with poorer washing results because you don't want to use detergent in order to avoid chemicals, be kind to the environment or save using rinse water, we'd suggest you wash in plain water alone and save yourself the cost of these laundry balls — \$79.95 for a set of two, plus delivery.



The distributor of Life Miracle Magnetic Laundry System objected to the use of a reflectometer to measure the dirt the laundry balls removed. However, while a reflectometer allows us to give the soil removal a precise score, you don't need one to tell which swatch was washed in detergent (left) and which with the laundry balls (centre) or plain water (right).

Childhood obesity

Eight significant early-life risk factors for obesity have been identified, reports the November 2005 issue of CHOICE Health Reader. Researchers in the UK followed a group of 8234 children from birth to the age of seven and tested them for 25 different factors that experts had suggested were linked to obesity. The study, published in the British Medical Journal, found that of these, the following eight were significant:

- Parental obesity (if both parents were obese, the child had 10 times the risk).
- Maternal smoking during pregnancy.
- Babies with a high birth weight.
- Babies who are heavier than average when aged eight months and 18 months.
- Rapid weight gain in the first year or two of life, especially in babies who were light at birth.
- Children who sleep for shorter than average periods of time.
- Eating junk food.

- Watching TV more than eight hours a week (it increased the chances of obesity by over 50%).

As some of these risk factors can be eliminated or reduced, this information can have enormous future benefits, suggests *Health Reader*.

Also in November *Health Reader*:

- Researchers in WA have found that when drivers use a mobile phone they're four times more likely to have a crash resulting in hospital attendance, and that using a hands-free phone is no safer.
- A UK study comparing spinal fusion surgery for chronic back pain and traditional rehabilitation treatment (involving daily physiotherapy exercises and cognitive behavioural therapy) suggests that the surgery is only marginally better than rehabilitation, and isn't worth the substantial cost of the procedure.

If you'd like to subscribe to *CHOICE Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free, or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

UPDATE

MANDATORY SAFETY STANDARD FOR BASKETBALL HOOPS

A new mandatory safety standard was introduced in October last year that addresses the safety hazard relating to basketball rings/hoops and backboards. As we reported last June, if these rings and backboards are installed on brick walls that aren't designed to withstand the pressure of continual slam-dunking, serious injuries can occur — CHOICE gave the example of a schoolboy in WA whose left foot and both hands were severed when a wall collapsed when he slam-dunked a ball through the hoop attached to it. Since 1996, three people have died in Victoria in accidents related to basketball hoops.

Suppliers of these products are now required to display notices at the point of sale and place permanent labels on backboards warning about the dangers of improper use and installation. For more information on this, contact the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (www.accc.gov.au or phone 1300 302 502) for a copy of a brochure for safe use and installation of basketball rings.



choicecuts

Are you being served?

Buying a new computer can be daunting. There's a seemingly endless list of models and variations and if you're not absolutely certain what you need, you'll probably end up depending on the not always reliable expertise of a salesperson.

In a recent survey by *Computer CHOICE* shoppers visited 114 retail stores and found large variations in service levels, knowledge and prices. Each shopper went into the store with the same scenario — a basic computer system with a 17" monitor, DVD burner and network card for a broadband connection.

Prices varied greatly — from \$700 to \$5999. And although our shoppers were pretty happy with the general level of knowledge and service in the stores they visited, they also experienced some startling examples of poor service, such as the salesperson who told our shopper: "The store doesn't encourage printouts because customers take them to compare notes." It's a pity some stores haven't worked out that good service and competitive pricing are more likely to result in a sale than trying to make it hard to compare products.

Other findings:

- Individual stores may have limited brands available.
- Antivirus software that comes free with a system is likely to be a trial version that only lasts a few months.



- Most of the 'extra' programs offered with systems are free, shareware or limited versions.
- You may get a cheaper price over the phone.

The internet is a great place to research computer systems. Once you've found a system that suits your needs, focus on the price. Ringing stores is a good start. Don't be afraid to haggle over the price as stores may offer a discount or meet a lower price from somewhere else.

The full report is available in the Nov/Dec 2005 issue of *Computer CHOICE*. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

Omega-3s in a capsule?

Fish, we're told, is good for us. The omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA in fish help to prevent heart disease, and may have other health benefits (for more on this see *Fish from the freezer*, page 18). But if you don't like fish or you find it hard to cope with the two or three fish meals a week that health authorities recommend, are fish oil capsules a good alternative?

Maybe, but talk to your GP about it first. Fish oil's not specifically recommended by the National Heart

Foundation (which simply advises us to eat fish) and it's been only partially endorsed by the American Heart Association (for people at risk of heart disease). Like all supplements, they should only be taken with medical advice.

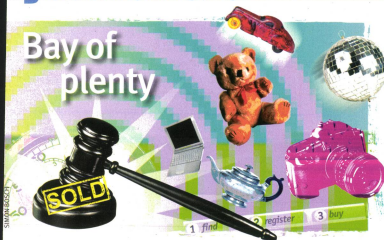
And people with an allergy to fish should also be cautious. While it's the protein in food that triggers an allergic reaction, there could be trace amounts of protein left in the oil, depending on its level of purity. Again, talk to your GP about it.

At least fish oil seems to be relatively free from environmental contaminants. The refining process removes most mercury, PCBs and dioxins. Studies have shown little or no contamination in over-the-counter fish oil supplements.

And fish oil capsules do seem to be a reliable source of EPA and DHA. *CHOICE* tested five major brands bought from supermarkets and suburban pharmacies in Sydney and found that they all contained at least as much EPA and DHA as claimed on the label. But we found some big price differences. As all the brands tested contained as much of the omega-3s as their labels claimed, you might as well shop around for the cheapest. But don't just go by the number of capsules — some brands contain 1000 mg of fish oil per capsule, others only 500 mg per capsule. Read the labels carefully.



Bay of plenty



eBay problems

I'd like to offer your readers a word of caution about buying products through eBay.

I recently bought a watch through eBay for just under \$1000 from a guy in the Netherlands. As with most eBay transactions, the payment was made through PayPal — eBay's financial transaction arm. Ten days after paying for the watch I received an empty box.

The person who sold me the watch was adamant he had sent it in the box, despite the fact that the weight of the box as sent in the Netherlands was the same as the weight received here.

I lodged a dispute claim with Square Trade, eBay's third-party dispute resolution provider. After paying nearly \$40 for this service, the dispute failed to reach a resolution and Square Trade terminated any further negotiations.

The only recourse I now have left is a slim possibility of claiming on my credit card's insurance or action by the Netherlands police through Interpol.

**Name and address withheld
South Australia**

Our reader has since contacted the Australian Federal Police, who referred him to his local police station. An officer there told him that the amount of money involved wasn't sufficient to justify any action on their part.

Our reader didn't want to be identified so eBay couldn't respond to the specific case. However, it says the overwhelming majority of its transactions are trouble-free. If something does go wrong it's important, in the first instance, to report the problem using eBay's online dispute resolution service at www.ebay.com.au/securitycentre, not Square Trade. Raising a dispute through

eBay's service may assist a buyer who hasn't received an item to access either eBay or PayPal buyer protection, which can provide cover of up to \$375 and \$1500 respectively.

eBay advises buyers to get to know their seller by reading comments from other eBay users at the seller's online Feedback Rating; reviewing the seller's other items to assess the overall quality/type of items they usually trade; and asking the seller questions about their item and sales policies before bidding.

Toxic toys

At the Brisbane EKKA last year, we bought showbags containing cheap plastic cars and trucks manufactured in China. When we unpacked them, we noticed a smell (something like diesel and solvent) coming from some of the toys, which also felt greasy. Within five minutes of handling the toys both my five-year-old son and I developed a rash on our hands. We had to set the toys aside, much to my son's disappointment.

It concerns me that possibly toxic toys like this are available. Not long ago, we had to return a child's bed because the paint on it was so toxic we were getting headaches walking into our child's bedroom, days after we'd unpacked it.

**Andrew Brooks
Alderley, Qld**

THUMBS UP!



■ Linda Norman, of Port Melbourne,

Victoria, awards a 'Thumbs Up' to **PTN AUSTRALIA**. When her four-year-old son Ben, who suffers from a serious medical condition, damaged his favourite *The Lion King* CD, distributor **PTN** sent him a new CD the following day free of charge. A month later a **PTN** staff member personally delivered another complimentary *The Lion King* CD and book to Ben at home.

CHOICE recommended Andrew contact the Queensland Department of Fair Trading about the toys, which he did. They're now undergoing testing.

Troublesome termites

I applaud the depth of the *Finding a good pest manager* article (CHOICE, October 2005). It's important that readers recognise that the industry refers to itself as a control service. Despite any effort at perfection, at best the service is not an exact science.

Many circumstances inhibit the perfect control of termites, such as the design and building methods used in construction, changes to the water table due to ineffective drainage and floods, and the growth of plants and trees near the building.

It must be understood that when the word 'warranty' is used it usually only refers to a free service in the event of a reinfestation. It therefore pays to use the services of a company that offers damage replacement insurance.

G Ray Peek

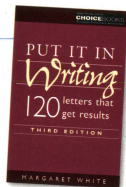
**Founder, Allpest Australia
Victoria Park, WA**

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Andrew Brooks of Alderley, Queensland, receives *Put it in writing* or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, page 48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.





GETTY IMAGES

Losing it

Can losing weight be as easy as popping the latest pill?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ The evidence behind the weight-loss hype isn't very convincing — despite what you might think the ads are telling you.

■ As the National Health and Medical Research Council says in its advice to GPs: "There is no evidence of significant long-term weight loss from any of these [weight-loss products]. Patients should be advised about the lack of evidence for using over-the-counter weight-loss medications and, in some cases, the dangers of using them."

"Get back to fantastic summer shape", "Is it your turn this summer?", "Do you need to manage your weight?", "Start losing weight in just two weeks" ...

If you read the ads and are left with the impression that simply popping a few pills could be the answer to all your weight worries, there are some things you should know — and how to read what the ads are really saying is at the top of the list.

Ads are clever — ad agencies don't get paid big bucks for nothing. But the full story can be found in the fine print of most ads.

■ The testimonials that shout at you in large print things like "Losing 14 kilos in 24 weeks while taking product X has made me more confident and energetic" were until recently simply qualified in the fine print: "Featured cases are exceptional. Results may vary." In other words, don't expect this to happen to you, chances are it won't — not quite

the impression the main part of the ad was hoping to make. Recent changes to laws mean typical cases must now be used for new ads — but they're only typical if you follow the diet and exercise advice (see below), not if you just swallow the pills.

■ Dramatic before and after shots have also carried the same disclaimer. One ad we saw had no less than 11 different before and after shots, the only headline being "Is it your turn this summer?" Maybe it is, but judging by the disclaimer — "Featured cases are exceptional, results may vary" — you'd have to be feeling lucky.

■ That other bit in the fine print: "In conjunction with a calorie-controlled eating plan and exercise." Wasn't that what we were trying to avoid in the first place by going for a weight-loss pill? These products aren't allowed to claim they work without a calorie-controlled diet and exercise. The most they can claim is that you may lose more if you take them than if you just did the hard yards. The fine print tells you there's no dodging the diet or the activity.

■ When it comes to actual weight loss (rather than more nebulous claims like reducing your appetite or 'sugar cravings'), what you'll see claimed is "May assist in weight loss". Think carefully about what that means — it doesn't mean just swallow this and you lose weight.

CSI*: FORENSIC EVIDENCE

Quite apart from all the argy-bargy about what the ads can and can't claim, how good is the evidence these products, or at least their ingredients, can really make you lose weight?

We searched the medical literature for the evidence on 10 common weight-loss ingredients found in four or more of the 18 products we looked at. Overall the evidence for these ingredients isn't very convincing, though some look more promising than others. See *The top 10 ingredients*, page 12, for a full discussion of them.

**That's a CHOICE Special Investigation.*

WHAT THE 'SPONSORS' SAID

We asked the 10 distributors (the Therapeutic Goods Administration calls them 'sponsors') of the 18 products we looked at for evidence to support their products' efficacy. Only four sent supporting documentation of some kind.

However, this didn't add greatly to the information we'd collected through research sources. And it wasn't uncommon for a sponsor to send selected published papers that supported a positive finding for their ingredients, while ignoring the overall body of evidence, which was mixed.

Some sponsors sent unpublished trial information for their product, but generally these weren't good-

And they're government approved ...

If you imagine these weight-loss pills are heavily regulated by the government — individually tested and approved for efficacy and safety before they hit the market — you'd be mistaken.

However, there is some regulation. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is the government body charged with regulating complementary medicines like these. And it's the one responsible for insisting on the fine print discussed on page 8.

'Therapeutic goods' like these weight-loss products can be registered or listed by the TGA. If you're not sure of the difference between a listed (labelled AUST-L) and a registered (AUST-R) product, you'd not be alone.

Registered products are evaluated by the TGA before they're allowed on the market, to ensure they're both effective and safe — for example, prescription medicines. AUST-L listed products, like the ones we're talking about in this article, don't get the same premarket grilling.

All the complementary weight-loss products we looked at were listed AUST-L, except for two **ENERVITE** products

(**Ezi Slim** and **Hunger Busters**) that had been around for so long they were allowed to keep their AUST-R status when the regulations were changed in 1989. So don't assume that weight-loss medicines like those we looked at have had the full TGA treatment.

After the Pan Pharmaceuticals recalls of complementary and other medicines in 2003, the government asked an expert committee to look at how complementary medicines were regulated. Some of its members considered "that the current two-tiered system doesn't allow consumers ... to adequately distinguish those medicines that have been scientifically evaluated for efficacy by the TGA and those that have not".

The companies are supposed to hold a file of evidence to support the claims for their product. But judging by the quality of what they sent us by way of this evidence (see *CSI: Forensic evidence*, page 8), we suspect the TGA might not be overwhelmed by the information they'd find if they decided to ask to look at it — **CHOICE** certainly wasn't.

One of the concerns raised by the expert committee

Which products, which ingredients?

Brand and product (in alphabetical order)	Tablets or capsules (how many days' supply)*	Price (\$)**	UNPROVEN FOR WEIGHT LOSS, BUT WORTH FURTHER STUDY					MAY HAVE AN EFFECT ON WEIGHT LOSS, BUT IT APPEARS SMALL		LITTLE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE	
			Capsicum annum / frutescens	Citrus aurantium	Garcinia quercita / cambogia	Phaseolus vulgaris	Camellia sinensis	Chitosan	Chromium	Fucus vesiculosus	
ENERVITE Ezi Slim	50 (17)	21.45									✓
ENERVITE Hunger Busters Double Fibre Strength	90 (15–30)	17.45									✓
ENERVITE Super Fat Metabolisers	60 (15)	34.95	✓	✓			✓				✓
HERBS OF GOLD Carb Blaster Phase 2	60 (30)	49.95				✓			✓		
JOHN PLUNKETT'S Exo Fat Loss System Double Action — Exo Fat Burner Formula (A)	90 (22–45)	(A)		✓			✓		✓		
JOHN PLUNKETT'S Exo Fat Loss System Double Action — Exo Fat Eliminator (A)	45 (5–15)	(A)						✓			
LADYBIRD Figure Slim Faze 1 Fat Burner	60 (10)	39.95			✓						✓
LADYBIRD Figure Slim Faze 2 Starch Neutraliser	60 (10–30)	39.95				✓					
MEDSLIM Natural Advance with Zinc, Citrus, Commiphora	30 (7–10)	28.95	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
MICRO GENICS Thermoslim Weight Loss for Her and Him	60 (30)	24.95	✓		✓				✓	✓	
NATURE'S WAY Metabolift Fat Burner Max Strength	90 (15–30)	37.95	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	
NATUROPATHICA Dietary Fat Blaster New and Improved Formula	60 (7–20)	26.95		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
NATUROPATHICA New Super Strength Max Dietary Fat Blaster	60 (10–20)	49.95	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
NATUROPATHICA Reducticarb	60 (7–60)	39.95			✓	✓					
OPTISLIM 2000 Plus	60 (15)	34.95	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
OPTISLIM Fat Terminator Weight Loss for Men and Women	60 (15)	29.95	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
VITAPLEX Professional Weight Control Thermogenic Weight Management	60 (30)	24.95	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
WOMEN'S CHOICE for Weight Management with Phase 2	30 (5–10)	28.00				✓					

was that many companies selling complementary medicines (known as the products' "sponsors") aren't equipped to substantiate claims by critically assessing the evidence, and that "when the TGA undertakes a review of the evidence held by these sponsors, the evidence will be found wanting".

The committee recommended the TGA undertake increased random and targeted audits of the evidence held by companies, and the TGA has agreed to do this. It says the number of new listed medicines reviewed has increased over the past year from 15% to 18%, and that it's working on increasing this further to 25%.

The manufacturers are audited to check they're making the products according to good manufacturing practice. But the TGA considers these products to be 'low risk' and says they're only allowed to make claims for "non-serious, self-limiting conditions". We're surprised that something as serious as overweight can be considered non-serious. Maybe if you just want to get into last year's swimsuit, but not if your health depends on it.

The TGA has a list of 'low risk' ingredients, and as long as your product only contains these, that's all you need to put it on the market.

NEW ADVERTISING CODE

A new version of the advertising code has just come into effect (towards the end of 2005). In theory it could clear up the problem CHOICE has with testimonials (see page 8). Now cases have to be 'typical', not 'exceptional' — that means the story the pictures and words tell needs to represent results that are likely to be obtained by anyone using the product. However, we've already seen an example where the pictures still look very dramatic, and now there's no disclaimer about results varying. Testimonials and before-and-after shots are only typical if you follow a healthy energy-controlled diet and an exercise program, not just swallow the pills.

Ads are approved for two years, so old ones may still be around for a while.

WHAT'S GOOD-QUALITY EVIDENCE?

As a minimum, studies should be:

- On a large number of people in the target group.
- Have a control group.
- Neither the participants nor the researchers should know who's taking the real pills until the study is complete (double-blind).
- The participants should be randomly put in the control or test group.
- The results should be reported in detail (with statistical analysis) in peer-reviewed, well respected journals.

And multiple studies supporting the outcome are needed, not just one.

OR WEIGHT LOSS

Gymnema
ylvestre Paulinia
cupana

- * Instructions often recommend taking, say, one or two tablets per day; where there's a range of days one bottle will last it's based on these recommendations.

- ** This is the price we paid in September 2005.

- (A) You buy both together for a total price of \$39.95.



GENE ROSS

Can you sniff your way thin?

A new product hit the shelves last year, with great word-of-mouth promotions. Oprah Winfrey gave it considerable publicity on her show when she told its inventor, Dr Alan Hirsch, "Give me a bottle, now!"

SLIMIST consists of an oral spray containing HCA (*Garcinia quaesita*) and chromium nicotinate (see *The top 10 ingredients*, page 12) as well as a form of the amino acid carnitine, which we haven't reviewed. The spray format is claimed to deliver the ingredients quickly to the bloodstream.

The different aspect of SLIMIST is the three 'scentsifiers' — small tubes of apple, banana and mint fragrances that you can sniff throughout the day when you're feeling tempted to eat. The smells are supposed to send a message to your brain that your hunger is satisfied. And much is made in the promotional literature of a study of 3193 people.

However, while the study is published, it isn't reported in enough detail to allow thorough analysis of the findings. Although some of the participants lost five pounds over six months (only about 2.25 kg, or less than 100 grams a week), it's not clear how many were even this successful.

Not only isn't the study good evidence that the product causes weight loss, it doesn't look at the whole SLIMIST program — oral spray and inhalants. We'd think much better evidence is needed before you rush out to spend \$60 on it.

The top 10 ingredients: evidence for weight loss

UNPROVEN, BUT WORTHY OF FURTHER STUDY

CAPSICUM ANNUUM/ FRUTESCENS

What is it? Hot chillies and red peppers.

What does it contain? Capsaicin is the active ingredient.

How is it thought to act? By increasing metabolism and fat burning, and decreasing appetite.

How good is the evidence? Studies on an increase in metabolism are interesting, but mixed — some show food intake is reduced after eating spicy food containing capsaicin. Most studies only looked at short-term effects on metabolism after a test meal in small numbers of people, not at weight loss. One which looked at long-term effects on weight regain in a large group of people who'd lost weight found it made a difference to metabolism, but that this didn't translate into a difference in weight regain. One study found obese women were less responsive to capsaicin than lean ones. It's not clear whether you need to taste the spiciness to get a significant effect, and this will obviously affect whether or not supplements might be effective. Good-quality long-term trials on weight loss are needed.

What are the risks? No safety studies were found.

CITRUS AURANTIUM

What is it? An extract of the rind of Seville oranges, also known as bitter orange.

What does it contain? Synephrine.

How is it thought to act? By increasing metabolism and fat burning, and decreasing appetite.

How good is the evidence? There's little evidence it's effective in weight loss. Larger and longer trials are needed. One recent study found an increase in energy burning in women, but the authors concluded the increase may not be enough to result in a significant amount of weight loss over time.

What are the risks? There's the possibility of blood pressure and cardiovascular effects and drug interactions — more research is needed.

GARCINIA QUAESITA/CAMBOGIA

What is it? The rind of the fruit of a tropical plant; also called brindleberry or Malabar tamarind.

What does it contain? Hydroxycitric acid (HCA).

How is it thought to act? By modifying metabolism, and reducing fat storage and food intake.

How good is the evidence? In animals it suppresses weight gain, but there's little good evidence in people. A number of trials in people have shown conflicting results. A positive study in humans of one form of the substance is interesting, but has been criticised in terms of its analysis and possible conflicts of interest. More good-quality, independent studies are needed.

What are the risks? There's a general lack of studies, but it appears to be relatively safe for short-term use in the doses tested on people. Long-term safety is yet to be investigated.

PHASEOLUS VULGARIS

What is it? An extract of white kidney beans, proprietary name Phase 2.

What does it contain? An alpha-amylase inhibitor (alpha-amylase is an enzyme that digests starch in the body.)

How is it thought to act? By inhibiting the digestion of starch and so reducing the sugars absorbed.

How good is the evidence? In the test tube, it stops starch breakdown; in animals, the evidence is mixed. A recent clinical trial with 50 obese people didn't find a significant effect.

What are the risks? Little data is available. The clinical trial over eight weeks raised no safety issues.

MAY HAVE AN EFFECT, BUT IT APPEARS SMALL

CAMELLIA SINENSIS

What is it? Green tea.

What does it contain? Antioxidants, including epigallocatechin gallate, and some caffeine (see *Paullinia cupana*, far right).

How is it thought to act? By increasing fat burning, reducing fat synthesis, blocking fat digestion and decreasing appetite. It's not clear

to what extent green tea catechins may act independently of the caffeine content.

How good is the evidence? In the test tube, catechins increase fat burning, and weight loss effects have been shown in animals. One animal study suggests weight may be regained when the treatment is stopped, and that the effect is less when it's swallowed, rather than injected. One study in 10 people found capsules of green tea extract increased energy burnt by about 330 kJ (80 Calories) a day in the short term, but it didn't look at whether it resulted in weight loss over time. A recent study in 35 Japanese men found a significant difference in weight after 12 weeks, but it was fairly small (on average about an extra 350 grams per month). Another 13-week study of 104 overweight people who had lost weight found no significant difference in weight regain with green tea capsules. There are other interesting studies in people, but there aren't any high-quality clinical trials, or those that exist are of combination products. Overall, more research is needed, but any possible effect appears to be small.

What are the risks? In theory, green tea catechins may affect hormone systems, so there's a possibility of consequences in pregnant women and young children, for example. However, none of the handful of studies in people has reported adverse effects.

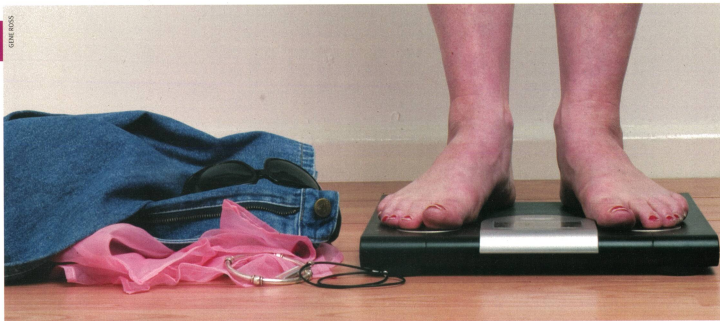
CHITOSAN

What is it? A compound from the exoskeleton of crustaceans (prawns, crabs, lobsters).

What does it contain? Chitosan is the active ingredient.

How is it thought to act? By binding fat in the intestines, so less is absorbed.

How good is the evidence? In the test tube it binds fat, and a few animal studies have shown an effect on weight. But the evidence it works in people is not convincing — most studies have problems with their methods and the results are conflicting and short-term. A meta-analysis of clinical trials (a statistical analysis of all their results taken together) found that it's doubtful whether chitosan is effective in people. It concludes that if there's an effect it's



minimal and unlikely to be significant. Studies looking at the amount of fat excreted found it to be insignificant in terms of weight loss.

What are the risks? Little is known, but gastrointestinal disturbances, such as constipation and flatulence, are the most commonly reported side effects. People with an allergy to shellfish might want to avoid taking it. It's also possible that the absorption of essential nutrients could be affected.

LITTLE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE CHROMIUM

What is it? The essential trace element chromium, most commonly used in the form of chromium picolinate.

What does it contain? Chromium.

How is it thought to act? Enhances insulin activity and fat burning; it may increase lean body mass and decrease body fat.

How good is the evidence? Its effectiveness is controversial and in general experts conclude there's insufficient evidence. An analysis of 10 clinical trials suggests that if there's an effect it's very small — 80 to 200 grams a week of weight loss — and it's not enough to make a significant difference compared to diet and exercise. The US Federal Trade Commission concluded in 1997 that there was no basis for weight-loss claims.

What are the risks? No human studies have reported side effects of concern. However, a possibility of DNA damage has been raised

in test tube and animal studies, though some experts have refuted this. The data suggests high doses (more than 400 µg) may be of concern, but further data is needed on the possible effect of lower doses over a longer term. These concerns have been raised about chromium picolinate, not other forms of chromium, such as chromium chloride. Of the chromium-containing supplements we looked at, only **OPTISLIM 2000 Plus** and **SLIMIST** didn't use the picolinate form.

FUCUS VESICULOSUS

What is it? A type of seaweed.

What does it contain? Iodine.

How is it thought to act? Iodine increases thyroid activity, increasing metabolism and energy burn.

How good is the evidence? There's one inconclusive study of it for obesity in the literature. There's no evidence that iodine will increase metabolism unless you're deficient in it.

What are the risks? An excess of iodine could cause an overactive thyroid.

GYMNEMA SYLVESTRE

What is it? The leaves of a climbing plant.

What does it contain? Gymnemic acids.

How is it thought to act? In the mouth, it stops you tasting sweet foods as sweet for several hours. It may also reduce the absorption of both sugars and fats.

How good is the evidence? No trials on people that looked at weight loss were found, except when mixed with other weight-loss herbs. There's test tube and some animal evidence that it affects fat and sugar absorption, but no good evidence it's effective in weight loss.

What are the risks? There's little data on possible interactions with other medications and minerals in the diet. It may interact with diabetes medications.

PAULLINIA CUPANA

What is it? A South American vine also known as guarana.

What does it contain? Caffeine.

How is it thought to act? By increasing metabolism and fat burning, and decreasing appetite.

How good is the evidence? Some evidence in animals shows caffeine affects metabolism. Several small, short-term metabolic studies have shown an increase in metabolic rate after taking caffeine, but these haven't looked at effects on weight loss. One good-quality study looked at weight loss and found that caffeine and a weight-loss diet had no more effect than just the diet.

What are the risks? Caffeine may contribute to insulin resistance. Large doses of caffeine can cause anxiety, gastrointestinal discomfort, insomnia, heart arrhythmia and problems in pregnancy, and can lead to dependence.

The long and short of manual and semi-automatic espresso machines.

COFFEE CULTURE



IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: 12 manual and semi-automatic espresso machines costing \$400–\$600. Overall these models made better coffee than the much more expensive automatic machines (costing between \$800 and \$1500) tested in August 2005.

“If I can’t drink my bowl of coffee three times daily, then in my torment I will shrivel up like a piece of roast goat,” sings coffee lover Lieschen in JS Bach’s 18th century Coffee Cantata.

If you too need your first cuppa before you feel human in the morning, you might want to invest in your own coffee maker. And with most of these manual and semi-automatic machines making better-tasting coffee than the more expensive automatic machines we tested in 2005, you needn’t spend a fortune to enjoy good-quality coffee in your own kitchen.

THE TEST

The test included the taste and temperature of the coffee, the quality of the milk froth, the consistency of the coffee from cup to cup, the time it took to make and how easy the machines are to use.

For the all-important taste test, our highly discerning professionals compared the coffee made by these machines with a high-quality espresso from a good commercial machine. Scores ranged from 45% to 65%, which isn’t too bad considering the automatic models tested last year only managed a top score of 50% for taste.

On the whole these machines also produced very good-quality milk froth — better than most of the models tested previously.

THE VERDICT

Overall the KENWOOD ES630 had the top score of 73%, and was rated equal best in the taste test. At \$399, it’s also one of the cheapest models in this test.

The KRUPS Nespresso and SUNBEAM Café Aromatic also performed well. The KRUPS machine can only be used with Nespresso coffee pods, which are inserted into the filter holder and contain enough coffee for one cup. It means you can avoid the hassle of measuring out ground coffee but, at \$5.90 or \$6.20 (depending on the coffee) for a pack of 10 plus delivery, it’s also a more expensive option.

We also compared these machines with our previously recommended model, the BREVILLE Café Roma ESP8B. This old favourite makes coffee just as well as the top-rated model in this test and, at \$210, is considerably cheaper.

MANUAL VS SEMI-AUTOMATIC

The only significant difference between a manual and a semi-automatic machine is that a semi-automatic model switches off when it’s poured a preset amount of coffee into the cup. With a manual you have to watch and cut off the flow when there’s enough coffee in the cup. Fully automatic machines like those reported on in August 2005 do almost everything for you, including grinding the beans.

What to buy

Models are profiled in rank order.



KENWOOD ES630

Price: \$399

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall and competitively priced.
- Equal best score in the taste test.
- Fairly consistent temperature when making consecutive cups.

BAD POINTS

- Relatively slow to make the first two cups of coffee.



KRUPS NESPRESSO F8964970

Price: \$600

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest to use of all the machines tested.
- Very fast to heat up.
- Very easy to clean the filter holder.

BAD POINTS

- Can only be used with Nespresso coffee pods, which makes it more expensive, although the coffee itself came equal second for taste.
- Can only make one cup of coffee at a time.



SUNBEAM CAFÉ AROMATIC PROGRAMMABLE EM5800

Price: \$399

GOOD POINTS

- Equal best score in the taste test.
- Easy to clean surfaces.

BAD POINTS

- Steam builds up very slowly so it takes longer to froth the milk.
- Control buttons are harder to press than on some other machines



SAECO AROMA

Price: \$399

GOOD POINTS

- The temperature of the coffee was the highest in the test and also fairly consistent when making consecutive cups.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing in particular.



SUNBEAM CAFÉ SERIES EM6900

Price: \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Its twin thermoblock and pump mean you can make coffee and froth milk at the same time. It's the only machine in this test that can do this.
- Has a light that indicates when the water tank is empty.

- The large filter is easy to clean and empty.

BAD POINTS

- Lower taste test score than the other models in the *What to buy* list.
- Control lights are harder to see and pushbutton switches more difficult to press than on some other machines.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **DELONGHI Café Retro 1385** was equal best in the taste test but was let down by the lowest milk frothing score — which may not concern you if you generally take your coffee black.
- The **MAGIMIX L'Espresso Program Model 11232** and the **DELONGHI EC700** didn't make quite such good coffee as some of the models already mentioned, but you'd probably be reasonably happy with either of them, particularly if you found them at a good price. The **GAGGIA Baby Gaggia D** made similar coffee but its lower coffee temperature may not suit some tastes.
- The **GAGGIA Coffee Deluxe**, **SOLIS Crema SL 90** and **BREVILLE 800 Class 800ES** didn't make very good coffee, scoring only 50% or less in the taste test.

Brand / model (in rank order)

KENWOOD ES630
KRUPS Nespresso F8964970
SUNBEAM Café Aromatic Programmable EM5800 (A)
SAECO Aroma
SUNBEAM Café Series EM6900
DELONGHI Café Retro 1385
MAGIMIX L'Espresso Program 11232
DELONGHI EC700
GAGGIA Baby Gaggia D
GAGGIA Coffee Deluxe (B)
SOLIS Crema SL 90
BREVILLE 800 Class 800ES

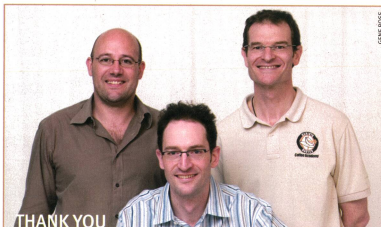
PERFORMANCE				COMPONE
1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Milk froth score (%)	4 Coffee-making score (%)	5 Taste test score (%)
73	77	80 (C)	70	65
72	82	80 (C)	66	60
72	74	80 (C)	69	65
70	70	80 (C)	69	60
69	78	80 (D)	63	55
68	70	60 (D)	69	65
68	73	80 (D)	63	55
67	70	80 (C)	64	55
67	73	80 (C)	61	55
64	70	80 (C)	59	50
64	77	80 (D)	54	45
61	68	80 (C)	55	45



LITE MEGAMANN

What to look for

- When shopping for a coffee maker, if possible ask the salesperson to make a cup so you can test the quality of the coffee before you buy. Some Harvey Norman and Domayne outlets have display machines that let you make a cup of coffee in the store.
- You can also ask the salesperson to froth some milk so you can check out the milk frothing mechanism. Milk froth should be creamy with small bubbles.
- Look for a large-capacity water tank and large filters — they're easier to fill and clean.
- The exterior shouldn't have too many grooves that can trap dirt and make it difficult to clean. While stainless steel or brushed aluminium machines might look good at first, they're generally harder to keep looking clean.
- A removable drip tray is easier to clean.
- The controls should be easy to operate and operation lights should be clearly visible.



GENE RUSS

THANK YOU

Our thanks go to David (right) and Matthew (Centre) Gee from Barista Basics Coffee Academy and Toby Smith from Toby's Estate for lending their discerning palates to our taste test.

COFFEE-MAKING SCORE			FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS					
Time to brew first two cups (in:sec)	7 Coffee temperature (°C)	8 Coffee temperature range (°C)	Automatic turn-off	Cup-warming plate	Cord storage	Programmable coffee delivery	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
40	72	1.5	✓	✓	✓	✓	37 x 28 x 31	6.4	1	China	Kenwood	399
10 (E)	70	3.5		✓			29 x 22 x 27	6.6	1	Switzerland	Krups	600
45	68	3.0	✓	✓		✓	33 x 26 x 27	10.1	1	China	Sunbeam	399
30	77	1.5		✓			30 x 20 x 25	5.9	2	Italy	Saeco	399
45	69	2.0	✓	✓	✓	✓	39 x 33 x 33	12.9	1 (G)	China	Sunbeam	599
55	73	5.5		✓			37 x 29 x 27	7.7	1	Italy	DeLonghi	549 (H)
30	71	3.5	✓	✓	✓		31 x 26 x 25	6.1	1	EU	Magimix	399
50	74	1.5		✓			32 x 29 x 23	4.9	1	Italy	DeLonghi	399
45	65	5.0				✓	39 x 22 x 28	6.0	1	Italy	Gaggia	579
10	68	3.0		✓			36 x 22 x 27	7.4	1	Italy	Gaggia	499
50	66	5.0		✓	✓	(F)	31 x 28 x 24	7.2	1	Switzerland	Solis	599
300	70	3.5		✓	✓		32 x 26 x 31	11.9	2	China	Breville	400

- * Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in November 2005.
- (A) Modified in December 2005, but stocks of the tested model may still be available.
- (B) To be discontinued in January 2006, but stocks may still be available.
- (C) Milk froth test was done with the froth enhancer removed, as this method gave the better result.
- (D) Can't be used without the froth enhancer, or doesn't have one.
- (E) Can only make one cup of coffee at a time, so this is the time to make one cup.
- (F) Not programmable, but there are six factory preset quantities plus manual control.
- (G) One year on machine, five years on pump.
- (H) The recommended retail price when we bought it was \$549, but DeLonghi tells us it will be reduced to \$399 in the future.

1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Coffee-making score: 60%
- Ease of use score: 30%
- Milk froth score: 10%

2 Ease of use score

The following aspects were weighted equally:

- Ease of filling the water container.
- Filter convenience.
- Ease of frothing milk.
- Controls.
- Exterior cleaning.
- Coffee-making operation.

3 Milk froth score

This measures the quality of the milk froth produced.

4 Coffee-making score

This consists of:

- Taste test score: 70%
- Time score: 10%
- Temperature score: 10%
- Temperature range score: 10% (see below).

5 Taste test score

Three experts judged the coffee for crema colour and thickness, aroma, flavour, mouthfeel and aftertaste.

6 Time to brew first two cups

This is the time it took to make the first two cups of coffee, starting with a cold machine and including the warm-up time.

7 Coffee temperature

We made four cups of coffee in warmed cups as soon as the machine was

switched on and ready to use, and four more cups after it had been left on for 15 minutes. The temperatures of the coffee in the cups were then averaged. It's vital the water is around 90–92°C at the point of brewing, to get a good extraction of the aroma, oil and flavour of the beans. We can't test the temperature at this point but only as it reaches the cup, when it's already cooled down a little but should still be as hot as possible.

8 Coffee temperature range

We calculated the difference between the warmest and coolest cups in the two sets of coffee temperature measurements (see note 7) and averaged it. A lower range is better, as it means the coffee is more consistent from cup to cup.

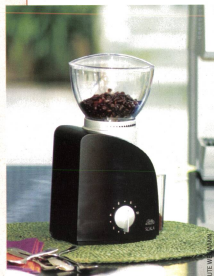
Handy hints

- Use the correct ratio of 7 g of coffee to 30 mL of water for an espresso. Using more water will make the coffee too bitter.
- Use fresh tap water every time you make coffee and discard old water sitting in the tank.
- Run a small amount of water through the pump before making coffee, even if the machine was used recently. Do the same after frothing milk, as the steam and water that have built up in the boiler and pump could burn the coffee.
- Buy a small thermometer to fit inside the frothing jug to monitor the milk temperature. Milk should be heated to a maximum of 65–70°C.

COFFEE GRINDERS

The best coffee comes from freshly ground beans. Of the coffee grinders tested in August 2004, the following are still available:

- **DE'LONGHI KG100**, \$169, overall score 93%.
- **SOLIS Scala Type 166**, \$169, 93% (pictured).
- **LA PAVONI Modello Jolly**, \$480, 83%.
- **GAGGIA MMBLA**: The exact model tested is no longer available, but a variant — **MMSILVER**, with a silver finish — is available for \$159; 70%.
- **SAECO 2002 Nero Australia Mac 001**, \$229, 63%.
- **GAGGIA MDFBLA**: the exact model tested is no longer available, but a variant — **MDFSTI**, in black with a stainless steel finish — is available for \$349; 52%.
- **BREVILLE Cafe Roma CG12**, \$69.95, 50%.
- **SUNBEAM EMO430**, \$79.95, 43%.



Fish from the freezer

Most frozen fish products are low in heart-healthy omega-3 fats — and they don't work out as cheap as you might think.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Most frozen fish products won't do much to boost your intake of omega-3 fats. The fish that's used is usually white fish (often hoki or hake), which is low in these fats.

■ Although quick and easy to prepare, even the most basic frozen fish products can cost more per kilogram of fish than more interesting fresh fish from a fish shop or your supermarket's deli counter.

Fish is a healthier alternative to meat and most of us should be eating more of it — two or three fish meals a week according to the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Fish is an excellent source of protein, contains essential vitamins (particularly A and D) and minerals (such as iodine), and the more oily types of fish are excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids that are good for your heart (see *Omega-3 basics*, page 20). And unlike fatty meat products, even oily fish is low in saturated fat.

Do frozen fish meals stack up on all these counts? They're certainly an easy option for a quick meal and you'll get the benefits of protein, vitamins and minerals. But you could be missing out on your omega-3s and these processed fish products cost more than you might think.

FISHING TRIP

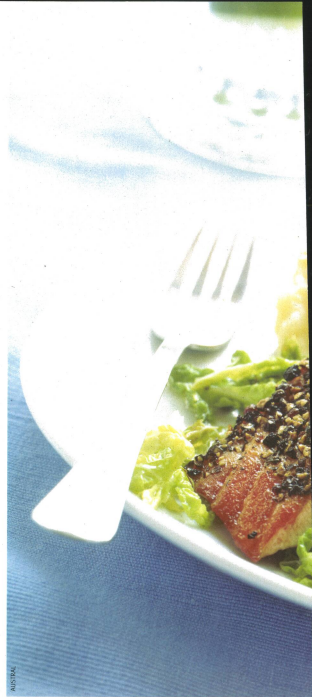
There's no lack of choice. Focusing on products that are just fish, crumbed or battered fish, or fish with flavourings or a sauce, we found nearly 50 different frozen fish products in the major supermarkets (and this didn't include the more humble versions such as fishcakes and fish fingers).

In the table (page 21) we've ranked them by the percentage of fish they contain according to their labels — how much actual fish you're getting for your money. Six products stand out as having 90% or more (see *What to buy*, left). But many brands have a lot less.

You'd expect products that are crumbed and battered to have a slightly lower percentage of fish, but some of the brands of fish with sauce have even less than they do. The **LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish** and **SEAWAYS Fish in Sauce** ranges came bottom of the league with only 48% fish.

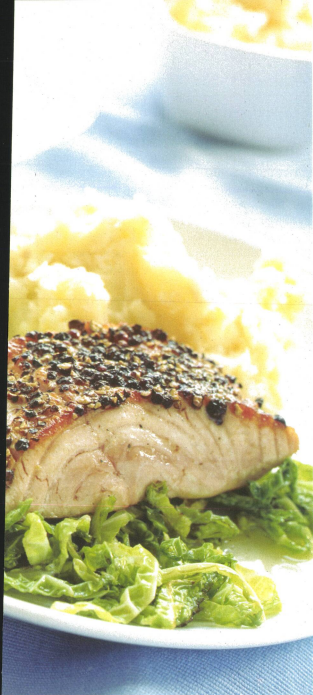
A HEALTHY CATCH?

None of the products in this test contains much saturated fat (see the table for details), so they're all a



healthy choice in this regard. But they aren't a good source of omega-3 fats unless you choose one of the **BIRDS EYE** Atlantic salmon meals or one of the products made from oreo dory (**SEALORD Catch of the Day Deep Sea Dory Light Crispy Crumb** and **BIRDS EYE Deep Sea Dory**).

Almost all frozen fish products are made from hoki or hake, or else the label just says 'white fish' (which generally means one or other of the same two species). White fish is low in fat and low in omega-3s in particular. So if you're serious about eating fish to boost your intake of omega-3s, you could be better off buying fresh oily fish (like salmon) from your local fish shop or your supermarket's deli counter. See *Omega-3 basics* for a list of the fish you'll get the most from.



CATCH OF THE DAY

Some manufacturers are more enthusiastic about the health benefits of omega-3s than is really justified by the amounts in their products:

■ **LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish** tells you on its label to “increase your intake of Omega-3 fatty acids, which help to maintain a healthy heart”. But they don’t tell you that with only 46 mg per serve you’d need to eat more than six serves a day of **LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish** to get even close to the minimum daily intake of omega-3s that experts recommend for a health benefit.

■ **BIRDS EYE Smart Choice with Omega 3** claims you can “boost your intake of Omega-3 fatty acids” by eating these fish fillets. It’s strictly true, but you’d need nearly two serves every day to get enough from this source

alone. In contrast, two serves a week of **BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Atlantic Salmon Lemon Pepper** or **Salmon Provencale** would give you more than enough.

MORE FOR LESS

Fish from the fish shop or deli counter can be as quick and easy to cook as frozen (see *Cook up a storm*, page 20, for some ideas) and you’ll find a much bigger range of fish species to choose from.

Another advantage of buying fresh fish is that you can choose fillets, cutlets, steaks or whole fish. Many of the frozen fish products in our test were made from ‘formed’ or ‘joined’ fillets — small bits of fish stuck together, cut from blocks of fillet that have been compressed and frozen.

When you buy from the fish shop you see the price per kilogram upfront and it can look like a lot of money. But most frozen fish products work out even more expensive per kilogram of actual fish (see the table for details).

When we compared prices we found hoki fillets for \$6/kg at a supermarket deli counter, whereas most of the frozen white fish was more than \$20/kg. And Atlantic salmon was about \$25/kg at the deli counter compared with \$36.95 per kilo of fish when frozen (**BIRDS EYE**). While you’re not surprisingly paying more for the privilege of buying something conveniently ready-prepared that you can keep in your freezer, with fresh fish you get the double whammy of a bigger variety of fish (many with higher levels of omega-3s) for less money.

WHAT TO BUY

BEST FOR OMEGA-3S

BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Atlantic Salmon Provencale (270 g) \$9.00

BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Atlantic Salmon Lemon Pepper (270 g) \$9.00

SEALORD Catch of the Day Deep Sea Dory Light Crispy Crumb (425 g) \$5.50

BIRDS EYE Deep Sea Dory (425 g) \$5.80

The two dory products are good for omega-3s but only contain 53% and 52% of fish; the Atlantic salmon products are 90% fish.

WHITE FISH — AND PLENTY OF IT

BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Cape Hake Fish Steaks (400 g) \$5.40

BIRDS EYE Smoked Cape Cod Fish Steaks (400 g) \$5.90

SEALORD Grill Bakes Glazed Natural Fillets Light & Tangy (400 g) \$6.29

SEALORD Grill Bakes Glazed Natural Fillets Zesty Lemon (400 g) \$6.29



PHOTOS: JANE BOSS



GENE ROSS

Cook up a storm

A lot of people don't know how to cook fresh fish or find it difficult to cook well. With a bit of know-how, though, it can be as quick and easy to prepare as frozen fish. CHOICE's home economist passed on her expertise.

Baking or barbecuing in foil. Place the fish on a greased double layer of foil. Add a little liquid such as stock, wine or lemon juice, and seasonings. Seal the fish in the foil and bake in a moderate oven or barbecue. Check occasionally to see when it's cooked through (see below).

Pan frying. This is generally best with fillets and doesn't need much fat. Very lightly grease a frying pan (preferably non-stick) and preheat it for about three minutes at a medium temperature. Place the fish skin side down (if it has skin) and cook it for three minutes, then turn it over and cook for another three minutes (or until it's opaque).

Grilling. This is great for whole fish or thicker cuts as it allows the fish to develop its own flavour and a golden brown colour. It can be basted with its own juices or melted butter while cooking, or marinated beforehand.

Steaming. Use a double saucepan or a bamboo steamer over a saucepan. Extra flavours such as lemon, shallots, ginger, white wine or soy sauce can be added after the fish is cooked. Cooking time depends on the size of the fish.

Microwave. Cooking fish in the microwave is similar to steaming — put it in a ceramic dish and cover the dish with plastic wrap. It's a quick method of cooking that retains all the flavours. As it's a moist cooking method additional liquid isn't necessary, but a small amount of butter, white wine or lemon juice adds extra flavour.

And a few general tips:

- Don't overcook fish as the flesh will become coarse and dry out and the flavour will be lost.
- Don't over spice it — fish has a very delicate flavour.
- To test when the fish is cooked, prod the thickest part of the flesh with a fork. The flesh should flake easily, and the middle section should be white rather than translucent.

Omega-3 basics

Omega-3 fats are polyunsaturated fats found particularly in fish, but also in some plants and plant oils (such as canola, linseed, soy and walnut) and to a lesser extent in meat.

There's now very good evidence that the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids (called EPA and DHA) from fish can reduce your risk of heart disease. There's also evidence that EPA and DHA are important for the development of the central nervous system in babies before and after they're born, suggesting that if women eat fish rich in omega-3s when they're pregnant and breastfeeding, this helps the baby's development.

The shorter-chain omega-3 fatty acids derived from plants (mainly ALA) are different and the evidence for health benefits from ALA isn't as strong. The weight of evidence, though, suggests that ALA may also help to prevent heart disease.

How much of these fatty acids should we be eating on average? Expert opinions differ a little, but typical recommendations are 300 to 500 mg per day of EPA and DHA, and 800 to 1100 mg per day of ALA.

Not all fish are equally good dietary sources of EPA and DHA, as there are big differences between species. Hoki, hake and other white fish that are in most frozen fish products have very little, but the species listed below will give you at least 500 mg of EPA and DHA per 150 g serve:

- Atlantic salmon.
- Bonito.
- Gemfish.
- Mackerel.
- Oreo dory.
- Sardines.
- Swordfish.
- Trevally.
- Mullet.

Tinned fish are an even easier option — mackerel, pink and red salmon and sardines are all good sources of omega-3s, but not tuna. If you don't like or can't eat fish, fish oil capsules could be another option (see *Choice Cuts*, page 6).

TABLE NOTES

1 Percentage fish

The manufacturer's claimed percentage of fish, taken from the label.

2 Nutrients

These are the amounts given in the nutrition information panel on the label.

3 Weight

The net weight of the pack as stated on the label.

4 Price per kilogram of fish

We calculated what you pay per kilogram of fish from the percentage stated on the label and prices we paid in Sydney supermarkets in September 2005.

Brand and type (in order of % fish)	1 Percentage fish	2 Nutrients		Origin	3 Weight (g)	4 Price per kg of fish (\$)
		Total fat (%)	Saturated fat (%)			
BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Cape Hake Fish Steaks	100	1.1	0.3	345	South Africa	400 13.55
BIRDS EYE Smoked Cape Cod Fish Steaks	97	1.1	0.2	303	South Africa	400 15.15
SEALORD Grill Bakes Glazed Natural Fillets Light & Tangy	96	2.1	0.6	350	South Africa	400 16.40
SEALORD Grill Bakes Glazed Natural Fillets Zesty Lemon	96	3.0	0.8	386	South Africa	400 16.40
BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Atlantic Salmon Lemon Pepper	90	14.1	3.1	845	Norway	270 36.95
BIRDS EYE Ocean Select Atlantic Salmon Provencale	90	12.6	2.9	795	Norway	270 36.95
I & J Flame Grills Lemon Pepper & Garlic Fillets	84	3.0	0.6	390	South Africa	400 19.00
I & J Flame Grills Olive Oil & Herb Fillets	84	3.0	0.7	390	South Africa	400 19.00
BIRDS EYE Steam Fish Fillets Coriander & Mild Chilli	78	0.8	0.3	308	South Africa	360 19.55
BIRDS EYE Steam Fish Fillets Garlic & Spring Onion	78	2.7	0.7	338	South Africa	360 19.55
BIRDS EYE Steam Fish Fillets Lemon & Parsley	78	2.8	0.6	338	South Africa	360 19.55
BIRDS EYE Steam Fish Fillets Thai Coconut Curry	78	2.4	0.7	339	South Africa	360 19.55
BI-LO Crumbed Fish Fillets Lite Lemon	70	7.1	1.0	685	(A)	375 14.80
COLES Light Fish Fillets	70	7.0	0.3	680	(A)	375 19.00
SEAWAYS Light Crumbed Fish Fillets	70	7.0	0.3	680	(A)	375 15.20
I & J Extra Light & Crispy Lemon Crumbed Portions	67	6.1	0.6	650	(A)	375 21.85
BI-LO Premium Choice Blue Grenadier Fish Fillets in Breadcrumbs	60	9.9	<1	912	(A)	330 23.70
COLES Fish Fillets Blue Grenadier in Breadcrumbs	60	9.9	<1	912	(A)	330 21.15
BIRDS EYE Oven Bake Lightly Battered Fillets of Ocean Hake	55	12.2	1.0	919	(A)	425 23.45
SEALORD Catch of the Day Hoki Light Tempura Batter	54	10.7	1.2	844	(A)	425 22.55
SEALORD Catch of the Day Deep Sea Dory Light Crispy Crumb	53	13.5	1.2	1031	(A)	425 24.50
BIRDS EYE Deep Sea Dory	52	15.4	1.3	1116	(A)	425 26.15
BIRDS EYE Oven Bake Herb & Garlic Fillets of Ocean Hake	52	15.1	1.2	1183	(A)	425 24.80
BIRDS EYE Smart Choice Light Crumbed Ocean Hake Fillets	52	6.9	0.8	790	(A)	285 30.30
BIRDS EYE Smart Choice with Omega-3 Light Lemon & Dill Crumb	52	7.0	0.8	787	(A)	285 26.90
HOME BRAND Crumbed Fish	52	10.3	<1	868	(A)	500 8.80
BI-LO Crumbed Fish Fillets	51	10.8	1.4	898	(A)	500 15.65
BIRDS EYE Oven Bake Original Crumbed	51	14.0	1.1	1042	(A)	425 25.30
COLES FARMLAND Crumbed Fish Fillets Oven Bake	51	9.8	1.1	1020	(A)	500 15.65
IGA Seapoint Lemon Crumbed Fish	51	13.0	1.5	1083	(A)	425 20.85
SEAWAYS Battered Fish Fillets	51	11.3	1.4	850	(A)	425 20.70
SEAWAYS Crumbed Fish Fillets	51	12.8	1.4	995	(A)	425 18.40
BIRDS EYE Oven Bake Crunchy Potato Fillets of Ocean Hake	50	9.4	0.9	934	(A)	425 25.80
COLES Fish Fillets in Crispy Golden Batter	50	13.2	1.2	913	(A)	425 23.50
I & J Fish in Sauce Premium Hoki in Creamy Parsley Sauce	50	4.2	1.5	375	(A)	200 29.90
BI-LO Fish in Parsley Sauce	49	5.8	1.1	450	(A)	200 27.45
BI-LO Frozen Fish in Cheese Sauce	49	7.0	2.4	517	(A)	200 27.45
COLES Frozen Fish in Cheese Sauce	49	7.0	2.4	517	(A)	200 24.40
COLES Frozen Fish in Parsley Sauce	49	5.8	1.1	450	(A)	200 24.40
I & J Light & Crispy Original Crumbed Portions	49	8.2	0.9	817	(A)	425 21.55
LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish with Creamy Sundried Tomato Sauce	48	1.8	1.0	260	(B)	220 33.05
LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish with Creamy White Wine and Vegetable Sauce	48	1.6	0.8	290	(B)	220 33.05
LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish with Florentine Sauce	48	1.6	0.9	260	(B)	220 33.05
LEAN CUISINE Purely Fish with Thai Style Sauce	48	2.2	1.5	265	(B)	220 33.05
SEAWAYS Fish in Cheese Sauce with Chives	48	9.1	4.5	592	(A)	200 31.05
SEAWAYS Fish in Lemon Sauce with Dill	48	4.4	1.6	410	(A)	200 31.05
SEAWAYS Fish in Parsley Sauce	48	6.9	3.1	490	(A)	200 31.05

(A) "Made in Australia from local and imported ingredients."

(B) "Made in Australia."

Home theatre in a box

There's more to sound than amps.



IN A NUTSHELL

- Speakers are still the weakest link in most systems.
- These are reasonably powerful systems, but there's a noticeable difference in sound quality between them.
- Setting up is often complicated and time-consuming.

In the home theatre market there's a lot of talk about power. Lots of amps per channel are touted as a good thing and subwoofers are supposed to lift you out of your chair as the alien on the screen plants a giant foot next to the heroine's head. In reality, power is only one factor in making surround sound work.

CHOICE's last test in December 2004 looked at the bargain end of the market. We found those home theatre systems weren't capable of delivering hifi sound, didn't handle damaged or dirty DVDs well, nor were they powerful enough to fill very big rooms, so for this test we chose eight higher-level systems with prices from \$1099 to \$1599. The power levels are up and some have wireless connections for the rear speakers, but although sound quality is generally better it's still not quite hifi, DVD errors are still a problem — and setting up remains no simple task.

GOOD IMAGE, SOUND COULD BE BETTER

All the DVD players in the test except the SAMSUNG HT-P1201 are capable of producing excellent pictures. The SAMSUNG has a lower score for picture quality because it produced a slightly less sharp picture, with less accurate colour saturation, than the others. It also limits its component connection (the TV video connection that provides best picture quality) to TVs that can handle progressive scan. Progressive scan generally provides better image quality, because the image is scanned completely from top to bottom rather than the more traditional interlacing, which refreshes only every second line of the image. Plasma and LCD TVs are all progressive scan, but most traditional TVs aren't.

Although all the systems in this test are powerful enough to fill a reasonably large room with sound, none could be described as delivering true hifi sound

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE					FEATURES			
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Disc error handling score (%)	6 Standby power score (%)	7 Power (front / centre / rear / subwoofer, W)	8 Wireless	9 DVD / CD changer
PANASONIC SC-HT880W	81	98	70	74	95	91	131 / 167 / 60 / (A)	RF	1
DENON DHT-500SD	79	94	76	72	56	97	120 / 120 / 102 / 95		1
SAMSUNG HT-P1201	78	73	83	76	62	86	131 / 131 / 72 / (A)		1
SONY DAV-FX999W	75	97	65	68	75	82	129 / 127 / 105 / 277	IR	5
SONY DAV-DZ770W	74	95	65	71	67	82	114 / 114 / 105 / 216	IR	1
ONKYO HTS680	73	93	66	75	57	70	116 / 133 / 108 / (A)		1
LG LH-W750TA	72	94	57	71	67	92	70 / 70 / 79 / 119	RF	1
SHARP SDA510W	72	94	61	60	67	96	91 / 94 / 70 / 90		5

when playing music. However, the systems in the *What to buy* list can deliver quite an immersive experience when watching a surround-sound DVD.

Our reviewing panel thought the other systems had more obvious faults when playing DVDs or listening to music:

- The **SONY DAV-FX999W** is 'muddy' and lacks impact, though the dialogue is clear via the central speaker.
- The cheaper **SONY DAV-DZ770W** is less clear for dialogue, but has good sound effects. It's harsh when playing music with male vocals and the point where the bass notes are taken over by the subwoofer isn't smooth.
- The **ONKYO HTS680** lacks punch and has vague rear effects. Male vocals tend to be boomy and hollow-sounding.
- The **LG LH-W750TA** is far too boomy in general and lacks some clarity from the central channel. Very much a 'one-note' bass.
- The **SHARP SDSA10W** sounds dull and vague when playing movies. Some reviewers were more generous than others when listening to music on it, but generally its sound performance isn't inspiring.

GETTING CONNECTED

None of these systems is easy to set up and get going: lots of connections and components need to be positioned or mounted so they're accessible and deliver the best results. See *Setting up your home theatre*, December 2004, or go to the same article on www.choiceextra.com.au for more information on where to place the speakers.

Once in position, the system needs to be balanced, so the speakers all deliver around the same volume to the listener. With all the systems in this test, this is done using a circulating noise burst, activated via the remote control. You sit in your normal listening seat and can vary the volume of each speaker in turn. In most cases the default settings for the systems in this test are very heavy on the bass, so this is a necessary part of the setup. You may also need to further adjust the bass level when listening to music.

To make sure you're not hearing things before they're meant to happen, you may need to compensate for having the rear speakers closer to your ears than the front ones. This is usually done by typing in speaker distances from your normal listening position on a setup screen.

Continued overleaf

WHAT TO BUY

PANASONIC SC-HT880w	\$1299
DENON DHT-500SD	\$1199
SAMSUNG HT-P1201	\$1499

The **SAMSUNG** has the best sound but the worst picture quality in the test. If you're really into music DVDs or want to play your CDs on your home theatre system, it could be the best choice, but most people would do better choosing the **PANASONIC** or **DENON** with their excellent picture quality and still good sound. See the profiles on page 25 for more detailed information on each of the three models.

JUST WHAT IS A 'SYSTEM'?

Apart from the speakers, these are mostly integrated (all-in-one) systems with a main surround-sound receiver/amplifier, one-disc DVD player and an AM/FM radio. There are four 'surround' speakers (two front, two rear), one centre speaker, one subwoofer. Exceptions are:

- Separate DVD player: **ONKYO, SHARP.**
- Five-disc changer: **SHARP, SONY DAV-FX999W.**
- FM only radio: **SAMSUNG.**

* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in November 2005.
ns Not stated.

(A) Active subwoofer (see note 10, below)

(B) Apply to Samsung for the enabling code.

1 Overall score

The overall score is made up as follows:

- Picture quality: 20%
- Sound quality: 40%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Disc error handling: 10%
- Standby power: 10%

2 Picture quality score

Includes technical tests for sharpness and colour accuracy at both the component and composite video outputs.

3 Sound quality score

- Listening test: 75%
- Technical audio measurements: 25%

4 Ease of use score

- Remote control: 35%
- Onscreen display and operations: 25%
- Connections: 10%
- Front panel controls: 10%
- Front panel display: 10%
- Handbook: 10%

5 Disc error handling score

- DVD error handling: 50%
- CD error handling: 50%

6 Standby power score

The amount of power the system uses when plugged in at the mains but not

being used. High usage wastes electricity and your money.

7 Measured power

This tells you how loud each speaker can go, measured at 10% distortion. (This is normal for cheaper systems – for hi-fi systems power is measured at 1% distortion; you can hear 10% distortion).

8 Wireless

- IR: Infrared.
- RF: Radio frequency (normally set to the 2.4 GHz band, but may be adjustable – see *Not quite wireless*, page 24, for more).

9 DVD/CD changer

The number indicates the number of discs the player can handle at once.

10 Active subwoofer

- There are two types of subwoofer:
- **Active:** Contains a separate amplifier that reduces the drain on the main amplifier and may allow for better clarity in the bass sounds.
- **Passive:** Relies entirely on the main amplifier for power.

11 Multizoning

Multizone systems can play DVDs from anywhere in the world. The rest are zone 4 (Australasia), in which they limits them to playing discs made for this part of the world. But many zone 4 players can be converted to multizone, either permanently or using a menu system for each disc. Check in the shop before you buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

10 Active subwoofer	11 Multizoning	Microphone socket	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
✓	✓		1	Panasonic	1299
	✓		2	Audio Products Group	1199
✓	(B)		1	Samsung Electronics	1499
	✓	✓	1	Sony	1499
	✓	✓	1	Sony	1099
✓			ns	Amber Technology	1599
			1	LG	1299
			1	Sharp	1099

NOT QUITE WIRELESS

First, don't take the term wireless literally. In the case of these systems, all it means is that you don't have to run wires from the central unit to the rear speakers, but there are still plenty of other wires and interconnections involved.

Home theatre systems come with two types of 'wireless' connection — RF, which uses a limited radio frequency, or infrared (IR), which uses a line-of-sight infrared light link. The two SONYs use infrared, while the PANASONIC and LG systems use RF in the 2.4 GHz band, which is shared with appliances such as microwave ovens, cordless phones and wi-fi computer networks. So there's the possibility of interference from or with these appliances. The RF systems in this test have optional frequencies the user can change to avoid this problem.

Interference is less of a problem with the infrared systems. However, they must be positioned so the link between the sender and receiver units won't be interrupted by people crossing the line-of-sight when they get up during the movie to get more popcorn.

■ The reaction of the two SONYs' IR system to such an interruption is to mute the rear channels momentarily. The system has a cigarette-box-sized IR sender that needs to be mounted high up at the front of the room (that is, the end where the central unit and amplifier are). At the rear is a similar IR receiver unit wired to one rear speaker

column, which also contains the amplifier for the rear speakers and has to be connected to power. Another wire connects the second rear speaker to this amplifier. Not exactly wireless. However, at least the IR link showed no increase in distortion compared to a wired link.

■ The LG RF system has a 'transmitter' unit designed to sit at the front of the room. Each rear speaker column has its own wireless receiver plus amplifier and has a power cable.

■ PANASONIC's RF wireless transmitter is a neat card-style unit that plugs directly into the back of the main amplifier. At the rear of the room is a small wireless receiver box and two amplifiers. The receiver needs power and there are also wires to each rear speaker. However, the PANASONIC RF link showed a slight increase in distortion in the output of the rear amplifiers. You might not notice this when watching movies because the rear channels are used mainly for sound effects, but if it's likely to annoy you, the PANASONIC system can be wired in the conventional fashion, as can the LG.

In summary, currently the only advantage of wireless is to avoid running a pair of speaker wires to the back of the room. RF wireless transmission may be prone to, or cause, interference, and IR may be physically obstructed — and both add complexity, not reduce it. Neither makes setting the system up quicker or easier. ■

What to look for

■ Home theatre (HT) systems come as a 'complete solution', but that will only work if you check they're compatible with the TV and other audio-visual products you already own. Check the manuals to ensure your equipment has connections for each component and that they'll work with each other.

■ Look for enough power to fill the room comfortably, but there's no need to buy a system that will fill a stadium if you're living in a small flat. All the systems in this test are adequate for a room around 25 m².

■ Check that the system will play all the DVD formats you're likely to ask of it. Remember you may be playing a disc from a relative or friend who's recording in a format you don't normally use.

■ Make sure you can comfortably position the speakers and other controllers (such as infrared connections) in your space. Ideally the speakers should be equidistant from your listening position, but that's rarely achievable, so an independent adjustment for each channel's volume and delay time (see *Getting connected*, page 23) is very handy.

■ Some speakers need to be carefully positioned to get the best from them — be prepared to experiment. Just turning a speaker a small amount can influence its sound characteristics in some rooms.

■ Avoid putting the subwoofer in a corner if possible, as this can increase the bass effect and may result in a boomy sound.

FEATURES THEY (ALMOST) ALL HAVE

For more on connections, screen proportions, audio modes, etc, see *Tech talk translated* in the December 2004 article on home theatre systems, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au for the same article.

■ Connections: At least one of each of the following — composite, S-video (except the SAMSUNG) and component (the SAMSUNG with progressive-scan televisions only — see *Good image*, page 22).

■ Disc functions: Fast play, slow motion, pause, frame-by-frame, resume play, repeat modes, title/chapter search, parental lock.

■ Screen proportions (aspect ratios)

available: 4:3 pan & scan, 4:3 letterbox, widescreen (16:9).

■ Progressive scan.

■ Zoom mode (except the ONKYO and SONY DAV-DZ770W).

■ Audio surround sound modes: Dolby ProLogic II, Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 5.1, dynamic range control.

■ Audio equaliser options: Independent channel volume preset, delay time adjustment (for setting the distances between you and the speakers).

■ At least 30 preset FM and AM channel positions (except the SAMSUNG, which has 15 FM only).

■ Remote control.

■ Sleep timer.

■ Headphone socket

■ Can play the following formats: CD audio, CD-R (audio), CD-R (MP3), video DVD, DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, DVD+RW and JPEG (the SHARP claimed to play JPEG, but we couldn't get it to do so). For the uninitiated, all but audio CD and video DVD would contain files you'd burned yourself — from a computer, for example.

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.



PANASONIC SC-HT880W



DENON DHT-500SD



SAMSUNG HT-P1201

PANASONIC SC-HT880W

Price: \$1299

System: Combined DVD/CD player, AM/FM radio and amplifier, with four tower speakers, central bookshelf-style speaker and active subwoofer. The wireless receiver is a floor-mounted shoebox, which also incorporates two amps for the rear speakers.

Good points

- Very good picture quality, disc error handling (the best in the test by far) and standby power scores.
- DVD sound is good, but music sounds a little bright. This could be reduced with careful setup and adjustment.
- Rear speaker connection can be wireless, or wired in the traditional way.
- Plays WMA files, and the only tested model to play DVDs recorded on DVD-RAM discs.

Bad points

- Awkward, poorly labelled speaker connections at the subwoofer.
- Remote control buttons are small and have some unclear labelling.
- Doesn't play SACD, DVD-A or MPEG4/DivX files.

DENON DHT-500SD

Price: \$1199

System: Combined DVD/CD player, AM/FM radio and amplifier with five small satellite bookshelf-type speakers plus a passive subwoofer. All speakers cable directly to the main unit.

Good points

- Excellent picture quality score.
- Second-best sound quality score.
- Can be connected to third-party high-quality speakers if you want to go for real hi-fi sound.

- Plays WMA files.

Bad points

- The worst disc error handling score — CDs are no problem, but DVDs need to be error-free.
- Onscreen display has small characters with poor highlighting of the selection
- Doesn't play SACD, DVD-A or MPEG4/DivX files.

SAMSUNG HT-P1201

Price: \$1499

System: Combined DVD/CD player, FM only radio and amplifier with active subwoofer, four stand-mounted satellite speakers and a centre speaker. Buttons and controls are accessible on the top of the vertical floor-mounted main unit.

Good points

- The best sound score in the test. It's the best for playing music and no slouch with DVD sound.
- Connections are simple, colour-coded and well labelled.
- Panel controls are minimal and well spaced.
- Plays WMA, SACD, MPEG4/DivX files.
- The only system in the test with HDMI output and USB input.

Bad points

- The lowest picture quality score in this test: desaturated, soft pictures with evidence of colour shifting in some circumstances. However, these faults are not major and it still achieves a good picture score.
- Disc error handling below average.
- No 5-video support.
- No AM tuner.
- Only allows component video connection with TVs that can handle progressive scan.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

All the others in the test have lower sound quality scores, but all are excellent for picture quality. The listening panel felt they lack the necessary clarity and impact to make surround sound work as well as the models in the *What to buy* list. However, the ONKYO has good sound output from its AV receiver and so could sound a lot better if it was sold with better-quality speakers.

Most have good ease of use scores, but the SHARP is difficult to set up and takes a long time to start playing, and the SONY DAV-FX999W is fiddly to use and set up.

What's the best-tasting
hummus in the supermarkets?

LUCKY DIP

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 19 hummus dips widely available in supermarkets.
- The flavour and texture of different hummus products vary hugely, but our taste test produced two clear favourites.

It's handy to have a dip or two in the fridge ready for picnics and barbecues, or to whip out when friends drop by. Hummus is one of the most popular types around, but choosing a good one can be a bit of a lucky dip. We put 19 hummus dips to the test.

TASTING IT

Our tasting panel was composed of some of the toughest critics around: CHOICE staff members. Fifty people took part, each tasting five different products served in unbranded containers along with plain crackers and water. Tasters considered the taste and texture of each product, and gave it an overall score. Each product was tasted by between 10 and 18 people.

MUM'S CHOICE and BLACK SWAN Skinny were the clear favourites. While not the most expensive on test — that's the poorly rating WEIGHT WATCHERS hummus — they're not the cheapest either, so if you're after a cheapy that's still a goody, the COPPERPOT is worth a look-in.

INTRINSIC INGREDIENTS

Hummus is generally a combination of five basic ingredients: chickpeas, tahini (sesame seed paste), oil, garlic and lemon juice. So we were surprised

Hummus history

Hummus is actually the Arabic word for chickpea, but the name has become synonymous with the dip, not just the one ingredient. Purists would refer to the dip (as we know it) as hummus bi tahini.

Hummus has existed for thousands of years, so it's virtually impossible to pinpoint its origin. It's used throughout the Middle East and is popular around the Mediterranean and in many parts of India. There are lots of versions, 'invented' in lots of places, which explains why you'll find many different spellings (hoummos, hommos, hommus, homous, humos, for example, as well as the 'hummus' we picked thanks to the Macquarie Dictionary). Variations in the basic recipe include garnishing with paprika or parsley. Egyptian recipes tend to add cumin.

It's commonly used as a dip for pita bread or chopped-up vegies, and as a sauce on meat or fish. It also makes a great substitute for butter as a sandwich spread.



when our taste test produced such a range of results. However, a look at the ingredient lists revealed a number of differences:

- The proportion of chickpeas ranges from 90% (in EARTH STAR and GREEN VALLEY) down to 20% (in PURELAND).
- Some products contain olive oil, others canola or vegetable oil.
- Instead of lemon juice, some products use food acid, or a combination of both. Some also contain vinegar.
- Some products have added spices, including paprika and cumin.
- Sugar is sometimes listed as an ingredient.
- Some products contain thickeners or preservatives.

The quality and freshness of raw ingredients may also vary between products, but this isn't something we could measure.

Generally, hummus with a smoother texture and a stronger garlic or citrus flavour did best in our test. Those with a plainer chickpea flavour and/or a grainier texture didn't fare as well. And the percentage of chickpeas isn't necessarily an indicator of how much you'll like it.



AUSTRA

GOOD DIET DIP

As dips go, hummus is probably one of the healthiest options. It's a decent source of important nutrients like fibre, calcium and folate, contains very little sugar and isn't too high in salt. It's not always low in fat, but the fat it contains is mainly the 'good' unsaturated kind. If you dip with veggies or low-fat crackers, even better.

Two of the brands on test (**BLACK SWAN** and **CHRIS'**) have a 'light' version, both of which scored higher than their respective regular versions in our taste test. But if you're watching your weight, reaching for the one labelled 'skinny' or 'lite' may not be your best option.

While **BLACK SWAN** Skinny and **CHRIS' Lite & Fresh** are lower in kilojoules and fat than the regular versions of the same brands, some other brands contain even less. And although **WEIGHT WATCHERS'** hummus is low in kilojoules and fat, one other product in our test is even lower (**HEAVENLY ORGANIC**) and also tasted better, according to our tasters. We've included it in the *What to buy* list for that reason.

WHAT TO BUY

The favourites MUM'S CHOICE

Price: \$1.50 per 100 g

Taster comments:

■ "Flavoursome (smoky)", "Finely textured", "Mild lemon tang", "Very garlicky".

BLACK SWAN SKINNY

Price: \$1.37 per 100 g

Taster comments:

■ "Very smooth texture", "Quite pert, citrus tone", "Good aftertaste", "Strong garlic flavour".

Cheap but still good COPPERPOT

Price: \$0.99 per 100 g

Taster comments:

■ "Tasted authentic", "Nice, nutty, light flavour", "Traditional taste and texture".

Watching your weight? HEAVENLY ORGANIC

Price: \$1.60 per 100 g

Taster comments:

■ "My favourite. Cumin seeds?", "Thick texture. Can taste the chickpea!", "I like the seeds — unusual".



COLE ROSS

1 Brand (in rank order)

MUM'S CHOICE

BLACK SWAN Skinny

YULLA

ATTIKI

COPPERPOT

HEAVENLY ORGANIC (A)

BLACK SWAN

POSEIDON

JOSEPHINE'S

EARTH STAR (A)

CHRIS' Lite & Fresh

COLES FARMLAND

SAVION

CHRIS'

PURELAND (A)

GREEN VALLEY

WEIGHT WATCHERS

FIFYA

HAKEA (A)

2 Overall score

(%)

Chickpeas (%)*

Energy per

100 g (kJ)*

Fat (%)*

3 Price per

100 g (\$)

75	78	948	13.9	1.50
73	72	764	12.6	1.37
67	49	782	12.6	1.66
66	87	629	6.7	1.33
66	87	629	6.7	0.99
63	80	438	3.2	1.60
57	46	1260	25.8	1.37
57	46	1260	25.8	0.83
56	60	513	5.0	1.16
53	90 (B)	705	7.7	1.09
52	86	732	8.8	1.37
50	85	990	16.3	0.80
50	70 (B)	1437	29.6	1.78
46	78	990	16.3	1.10
45	20 (B)	652	9.4	1.28
43	90 (B)	520	9.3	1.32
40	75	594	4.7	1.92
38	70	944	15.6	1.21
31	34	1030	16.8	1.33

* This information is from the product packaging, unless noted otherwise

(A) Some or all of the ingredients are organically produced.

(B) Information provided by the manufacturer.

1 Brand

We included a selection of refrigerated hummus dips that are widely available in supermarkets.

2 Overall score

Tasters completed a survey for each product. They considered both taste and texture, and then rated the product on a scale from 0 ('very poor') to 10 ('excellent').

Average scores for each product were calculated and converted to percentages.

3 Price per 100 g

Hummus dips are sold in containers of various sizes. For ease of comparison we've calculated the price per 100 g, based on what we paid in August/September 2005.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Battery score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Range score	5 Ease of use score (%)	6 Talk time (hours)	7 Standby time (days)	8 Recharge time (hours)	9 Range (outside / inside 1 / inside 2, m)
PANASONIC KX-TG1805AL (A)	76	82	73	75	71	22.5	10.0	2.5	350 / 95 / 65
UNIDEN DSS 2415 (B)	75	76	80	62	81	9.5	14.0	3.0	250 (M) / 80 / 50
PANASONIC KX-TG5821AL (C)	74	72	78	68	77	6.0	13.5	2.0	1000 / 70 / 50
UNIDEN DECT 1825 (D)	71	70	73	71	69	18.0	7.5	3.5	300 / 95 / 55
DORO DD5505 (E)	70	63	75	72	70	15.0	6.0	4.0	400 / 90 / 60
TELSTRA F5000 (F)	68	74	70	57	65	24.5	8.0	7.0	200 / 70 / 50
DORO DD530 (G)	66	65	75	61	58	20.5	6.0	7.0	300 / 70 / 55
ORICOM S6000TI (H)	65	53	68	62	80	11.0	4.5	6.0	400 / 70 / 55
GE AU21830GE3-A	64	66	68	56	64	16.0	7.0	4.0	250 / 70 / 45
TELSTRA F5500 (J)	63	48	63	59	88	14.5	4.0	11.0	200 / 70 / 55
BINATONE e850sms (K)	62	42	71	59	79	9.5	4.5	13.0	150 / 70 / 55
GE AU21850GE3-A SMS	62	61	63	55	70	18.5	3.5	4.0	300 / 60 / 50
ORICOM M4000TI (L)	58	61	59	47	64	15.5	5.0	4.5	200 / 70 / 25

What to look for

- Before you buy, add up the ringer equivalence numbers (REN) of the equipment you already have connected to your phone line. Any phone, fax, answering machine, etc., draws from the line's capacity. The amount drawn is the REN, which is usually printed on the bottom of the appliance. Generally, phone lines have maximum REN capacity of 3. If the sum of the REN of your appliances exceeds this, they may not work properly (for example, the phone may not ring).
- Consider whether you want a model with an integrated answering machine. None of the models in this test has one, though the **UNIDEN DSS 2465** twinpack does (see footnote B, right).
- Try the handset before you buy to make sure it's not too small or too heavy, is comfortable to hold and fits well to your face.
- If you have a large house, a phone that supports multiple handsets (for example, one on each floor) is useful. It also allows you to switch calls between handsets and with some models to make free calls from handset to handset like an intercom. Additional handsets are available for most of the tested models — see the table footnotes for details.
- Alternatively, look for a model with a dial pad and speaker on the base, which allows you to make calls from there.
- If applicable, check whether the phone is compatible with a hearing aid (see *If you wear a hearing aid...*, page 28).
- Headset connection: Using a headset can be handy if you make long calls or take notes while on the phone.
- Look for clearly labelled, large keys and a backlit keypad, which is handy if you need to use the phone in poor light.

FEATURES THEY (ALMOST) ALL HAVE

- Out-of-range warning.
- Call waiting compatible.
- Caller ID compatible: If you've subscribed to caller ID, the phone lets you know the number a call is coming from, unless the owner has requested anonymity.
- Digital signal encryption secures your conversations and over-the-phone credit card transactions from eavesdropping by all but the most high-tech scanners.
- Mute button.
- Key lock (except the **UNIDEN DSS 2415** and the **DORO DD5505**).
- Last number redial.
- LCD screen (some with backlighting and colour).
- Missed calls log: At least the last 10 calls.
- Phonebook: At least 10 entries, with most having a lot more.
- Adjustable ringer and voice volume control settings, and all allow you to switch off the handset ringer.
- Battery low indication.
- Rechargeable AAA nickel-metal-hydrate (NiMH) batteries, except the **UNIDEN DSS 2415**, which uses rechargeable AAs, and the **PANASONIC KX-TG5821AL**, which uses a NiMH pack, (a battery pack made specially for this phone, so you'll need to get a replacement one from the manufacturer).
- Speaker phone (except the **PANASONIC KX-TG 1805 AL**).
- Pager from base station to handset, which is useful if you've lost the handset around the house or in the garden.



									SPECIFICATIONS					
MS-compatible	Handsets supported	Baby monitor	Polyphonic ringtones	Headset connection	Calls from base station	Calls between handsets	Speed dial spots	Wall-mountable	11 REN	12 Type	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
	6						0	✓	1.0	DECT	1	China	Panasonic	79
	8		✓	✓		✓	10		1.0	DSS (2.4 GHz)	1	China	Uniden	129
	1		✓	✓			0	✓	1.0	DSS (5.8 GHz)	1	Malaysia	Panasonic	159
	6	✓	✓			✓	0		0.1	DECT	1	China	Uniden	79
	5						10	✓	ns	DECT	1	China	Doro	80
	5						0		0.1	DECT	(N)	China	Ingram Micro	70
	5			✓		✓	10	✓	ns	DECT	1	China	Doro	100
	5	✓		✓	✓		9		0.5	DECT	1	China	Oricom International	99
	5				✓		0		0.1	DECT	1	China	Thomson Telecom	90
	5		✓	✓			0		0.1	DECT	(N)	China	Ingram Micro	170
	6	✓				✓	10		1.0	DECT	1	China	Shiro	70
	4		✓			✓	0		0.1	DECT	1	China	Thomson Telecom	130
	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9		0.5	DECT	1	China	Oricom International	99

* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in November 2005.

ns Not stated.

- (A) Extra handset KK-TGA120 AZW, \$59. Twin pack KK-TG1807 ALW, \$124.
 (B) Extra handset DSS 2405, \$119. Twin pack DSS 2465 (including answering machine), \$229. Triple pack DSS 2475 (including answering machine), \$299.
 (C) Discontinued in January 2006 but may still be available in shops. Twin pack TX-TG5822 ACM, \$234.
 (D) Extra handset DECT 1820, \$69. Twin pack DECT 182541, \$129.
 (E) Extra handset DD551HS, \$80. Twin pack DD550S+1, \$150. Triple pack DD550S+2, \$229.
 (F) Extra handset CLS5010, \$60. Twin pack CLS5001, \$110.
 (G) Extra handset DD541HS, \$70. Twin pack DD530+1, \$110.
 (H) Extra handset S6050TI, \$99. Twin pack S6000+1TI, \$129.
 (I) Extra handset CLS5510, \$130.
 (K) Twin pack E8507S, \$100.
 (L) Extra handset M405091, \$89. Twin pack M4050+1, \$179.
 (M) This model was also in our last test (CHOICE, April 2005), where its outdoor range was 500 m instead of the 250 m it repeatedly achieved in this test. With an outdoor range of 500 m its range score this time would have been 65% and its overall score 76%.
 (N) 13 months.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of:

- Battery performance: 30%.
- Sound quality: 30%.
- Range: 20%.
- Ease of use: 20%.

2 Battery score

We measured the phones' maximum talk and standby times, as well as the recharge time, and weighted them as follows:

- Standby: 40%
- Talk time: 40%
- Recharge: 20%

3 Sound quality score

We assessed speech clarity, speech loudness, line noise and background noise reduction.

4 Range score

The range over which you can use the phone outside and inside a house (see note 9 for details).

5 Ease of use score

We measured and scored the maximum ringer volume, and a panel of three assessed the:

- Clarity and completeness of the instruction manual.
- Layout of keys and controls.
- Readability of the numbers and labels.
- Feel and comfort of the handset.
- Ease of cleaning the phone.
- Use of special features.
- LCD screen.

6 Talk time

The number of hours the phone lasted when switched on to talk, rounded to the nearest half-hour.

7 Standby time

The number of days the phone lasted in standby mode (switched on, not being recharged, but not talking), rounded to the nearest half day. We stopped the test after a fortnight.

8 Recharge time

The time taken to recharge the battery, rounded to the nearest half-hour.

9 Range outside/inside a house

■ **Outside:** The base station was set up with a direct line of sight to the handset. We measured the distance (rounded to the nearest 10 m) at which voice transmission became unintelligible or dropped out, up to a maximum of 1000 m.

■ **Inside:** The impact of walls and other obstructions on the range was measured to a maximum of 100 m (rounded to the nearest 10 m). For the 'inside 1' test, the signal had to travel through a plasterboard and a wooden wall. For the 'inside 2' test, the signal had to travel through a plasterboard and a brick wall.

The results are comparative only, as different wall and ceiling constructions will affect the range differently.

10 Features

See *What to look for*, far left, for explanations of some of these.

11 REN: ringer equivalence number

Generally phone lines have a maximum REN capacity of 3, so pick a phone with a low REN if you already have a lot of other appliances attached to the line. See *What to look for* for more.

12 Type

See *Digital phones and Interference*, page 28, for more on this. Only the DSS phone in this test that operates on the 2.4 GHz band (the UNIDEN DSS 2415) is likely to interfere with other wireless technology.



ERNE BOSS

On your scooter

Mobility scooters offer independence to people with a limited ability to get around — but you need specific skills to use one.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Hand strength,** balance, good vision and hearing, and the ability to concentrate and react appropriately are some of the skills you need to drive a mobility scooter.

■ **Independent Living Centres (ILC)** around Australia can help you decide whether you have the skills to use a scooter. You can also trial scooters at an ILC — see Useful contacts, page 34.

Maybe you're finding it hard to get to the shops, or feeling exhausted just walking around the home. Or you've got a friend, partner or parent who's losing their independence and confidence because of mobility problems. A mobility scooter may be just the thing.

Mobility scooters are for people mobile enough to operate a vehicle but challenged when walking distances, either because of a disability or a health problem. Scooters have three or four wheels, with models ranging from small, compact vehicles for indoors, to bigger scooters for whizzing round your local shops, to large models designed to handle rougher terrains. They're battery-powered and steered by a tiller or handlebars.

IS IT A CAR? A BIKE? NO, IT'S ...

Most mobility scooters are designed to travel on a footpath, like a pedestrian. They're not classed as vehicles if their speed limit is less than 10 km/h and they don't need to be registered except in Queensland, where registration is free. Any scooter capable of exceeding 10 km/h does require a licence and registration in all states.

In Queensland, you need a medical certificate to prove the scooter is for mobility purposes. The scooter also needs to be inspected before use in Queensland, but not in other states. Check the section for pedestrians in the Australian Road Rules before using a scooter outside (you'll find them online on your state's department of transport website, or go to the National Transport Commission at www.ntc.gov.au and click on it under Quick Links on the left side of the page).

Currently, Australian regulations governing mobility scooters only concern the speed limit, but the standards are being updated. Some experts worry that people lacking the necessary skills to use a scooter may get one anyway because there are no licensing requirements. Another issue is use



by people whose weight exceeds the scooter's limit, which can damage the scooter and make it unsafe.

IS IT FOR ME?

Before rushing out and buying a scooter, make sure the person intending to use it has the necessary physical and cognitive skills to operate and manoeuvre it safely. Levels of vision and hearing and the ability to get on and off the scooter should also be considered. While very few, there have been injuries and even deaths involving mobility scooters, so don't get on one unless you can operate it competently.

An occupational therapist or doctor can help assess a potential rider's ability, but here's a list of attributes you need:

- Enough hand strength and movement to use the controls, steer and turn the scooter. You also need to be able to turn your head to look to the side and behind you.
- Balance when riding on bumpy or rough ground, and the ability to sit for periods of time and change the position of your body when going up and down inclines.
- Good enough vision and hearing to notice



GAIL KOS

vehicles and pedestrians approaching, and to judge distances.

■ The ability to concentrate for the entire period you drive and to react quickly enough to stop and turn suddenly if necessary. You also need to remember safety procedures and exercise patience, especially in crowded areas such as around shopping centres.

Check with your healthcare practitioner if you're taking any kind of medication to see if it affects your ability to operate machinery — if it does, talk to the Independent Living Centre in your state about alternatives to a scooter (see *Useful contacts*, page 34).

UNBIASED ASSISTANCE

As well as having your skills assessed you can get assistance choosing your scooter from healthcare workers such as an occupational therapist, an aged care assessment team or a community healthcare worker.

The Independent Living Centre can help a would-be rider consider their ability to use a scooter. It also has some scooters for trial at its centres. Some ILC have a mobile service that visits outside

metropolitan areas. Alternatively, check out the ILC online or phone it for help.

Find a supplier who'll let you try out the scooter where you'll be using it. Most of the suppliers we contacted let people take the scooter home for a short trial, or hire the scooter out to a potential buyer to try. One company even deducts the hire cost from the price of the scooter if you buy it. Some also hire out mobility scooters for short periods — for example, for someone who's recovering after an operation. Call the Independent Living Centre for its database listing suppliers that hire out scooters, or you can ring a supplier direct.

HIT THE PAVEMENT

Assuming you've established you or the person you're buying for can use the scooter, think about where it's going to be used, so you know what kind to purchase. (See *What to look for*, page 34).

Scooters are intended as an aid to mobility but not as a person's sole means of transport. So if the scooter's to be taken out for longer trips, check you or the person using it can get it onto public transport — ring and find out if your local transport has low-floor ramps — and that they can get help to put it into a taxi or car. In some states, public transport won't take three-wheeled scooters due to their instability.

The next thing to consider is storage. Many users house their scooter in a carport or garage, or in the house if it's for home mobility. Access to a power point is essential, as mobility scooters run on rechargeable batteries (which should be charged daily).

AFTER YOU'VE BOUGHT IT

Experts say a scooter ought to be serviced once a year, or more often if it's used frequently. Check if your supplier provides after-sales service — far more convenient than having your scooter sent away for repairs.

Scooters and safety

- Use a safety flag, high enough above your head to be easily visible.
- Install and use rear-view mirrors.
- Don't exceed the legal speed limit — 10 km/h.
- Use sun protection when travelling outdoors.
- Avoid driving at night, but if you must, use lights and reflectors.
- Plan your route before travelling, avoiding busy roads, intersections and roundabouts. Ride on the footpath wherever possible.
- Never stop on or drive your scooter up or down inclines greater than it's designed to handle, as it can tip over.
- Don't drink and ride!

Before each trip, check the horn works, the tyres are pumped up and the batteries are fully charged. Keep batteries charged when the scooter's not in use. Your batteries should last about two to four years before you need to buy new ones (providing you look after them).

Prior to buying, also find out what kind of warranty your scooter has — we found a range from 12 months to three years, with two years for the scooter and one year for batteries being the most common. Some suppliers give different warranties for different parts of the scooter, so make sure you're aware of what's covered and for how long.

Insurance is another necessary cost. As mobility scooters aren't classed as motor vehicles you can't get vehicle insurance for them. Not all the insurers we spoke to cover them, but most that do recommend owners add the scooter to their home contents insurance, while some have a separate policy covering mobility scooters. You'll have to ring around to find what cover is available in your state, and check the policy carefully to ensure it covers personal and property damage your mobility scooter may cause you or others, and that you're covered outside your home and on public footpaths.

SCOOTERS AND SHOPPING

Many large shopping centres now lend scooters to patrons for a couple of hours while they're shopping. It's advisable to call the centre's customer service centre in advance to book one.

All the shopping centres we spoke to offer them as a free service. In most cases you need to fill in a 'hire' agreement form and leave some kind of identification while you use the scooter. Read the form carefully — by signing it you may find you've agreed to take responsibility for any injuries or breakages you may cause.

FINANCES

Our research found scooters ranging in price from \$1500 for a very light one that would probably be suitable for indoor use, to \$6800 for something designed for use outside.

Limited financial assistance for people buying aids and equipment for disabilities is available (see *Useful contacts*). You could also try contacting a charity such as Rotary and Lions Clubs, which may raise funds for the person needing the scooter.

What to look for

Make a checklist of your needs before shopping around. Consider:

- Where the scooter will be used. If indoors, a smaller one with a reasonable turning circle is likely to be best. If it's mostly outdoors, you'll need something sturdier, especially if you'll be travelling over bumpy or hilly ground.
- Decide what other features you'd like on your scooter, such as a basket, a canopy for weather protection or a walking-stick holder.
- Other equipment, such as an electrically operated loader to lift a scooter into the car, is also available.



Useful contacts

■ **The Independent Living Centre:** phone 1300 885 886 and you'll be transferred to the centre in your state, or go to www.ilcaustralia.org.

■ **Financial assistance:**

We've been told funding is only given for mobility scooters in exceptional circumstances. If you wish to find out more, though, call the department of health in your state:

ACT: ACT Equipment Scheme, phone 13 22 81.

New South Wales: The Program of Appliances for Disabled People (PADP), phone (02) 9391 9000.

Northern Territory: The Territory Independence and Mobility Equipment Scheme, phone (08) 8951 6744.

Queensland: Medical Aid Subsidy Scheme (MASS), phone (07) 3234 0111.

South Australia: The Independent Living Equipment Program (ILEP), phone (08) 8266 5260; 1800 800 523 for country callers.

Tasmania: Community Equipment Schemes — phone north (03) 6348 7906, north-west (03) 6440 7093, south (03) 6222 7393.

Victoria: Aids and Equipment Program, phone (03) 9616 7777; Transport Accident Commission (TAC), phone 1300 654 329.

Western Australia: Community Aids and Equipment Disability Program, phone (08) 9426 9200.

■ **War veterans** should enquire at the Department of Veterans' Affairs: phone 133 254.

■ **Scooter lessons:** Councils on the Ageing (COTA) have a booklet called *A Scooter Driver's Guide* and a scooter safety video. For more information go to www.cota-act.org.au/Livedrive/scooters.html.

■ **Roadside repairs:** Motoring organisations in each state (the AANT, NRMA, RAA, RACQ, RACT, RACV and RAC of WA) have roadside services for mobility scooters, and some offer this service free even if you aren't a member. Call your state's motoring organisation for more information.

Cleaning up

You don't have to pay a lot to get a good vacuum cleaner.

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 13 vacuum cleaners under \$250.
- These cheap vacs didn't pick up dirt from carpet quite as effectively as some more expensive models in previous tests, but a higher price isn't a guarantee of better performance, which varies across the whole price range.

With many vacuum cleaners now costing up to \$900 or more, you might be wondering if a cheap model is worth buying. The answer is that some are: our test shows that while not all models tested performed quite as well as some mid-priced or expensive models, some cheap vacs can still do the job.

For example, scores for dirt removal from carpet in this test range from 44% to 67%. Dirt removal for models priced \$599–\$899 ranged from 69% to 77% (CHOICE, July 2005), while for models costing \$269–\$499 the range was 58% to 88% (CHOICE, August 2004). So models at the top end of this latest test's dirt removal score range are competitive with some of the more expensive models.

We tested 13 popular models priced from \$99 to \$249, all of them barrel models. A few upright models are available in this price bracket, but barrel models are much more common.

As in previous tests, we found that higher power doesn't guarantee better cleaning performance. The wattage range in this test was 1220–1900 W, and none of the most powerful machines made it into the *What to buy* list.

TURBO HEADS

A turbo head has a rotating brush driven by the air flowing through the head; it's not the same as a power head, which has an inbuilt motor to drive the brush. They're designed to enhance cleaning performance, particularly on carpet, and generally we've found a power head to make a much bigger difference to cleaning performance than a turbo head. Only two of the tested models, the LG Shark and the PIRANHA Enviro, came with a turbo head. They both performed slightly better on carpet with it than without.

WHAT TO BUY

LG Shark V-CB574HTU	\$249
SAMSUNG Clean Force SC4040	\$199
VOLTA Dolphin Series II U9020	\$149

These three models perform similarly to each other on carpet and hard floors with their standard heads, but the LG's performance on carpet is better when its turbo head is used.



What to look for

- You can't go past a vacuum cleaner that's light, quiet and easy to manoeuvre over both carpet and hard surfaces. A long cord, so you're not forever changing power points, as well as a neat, compact design for easy storage, are other bonuses.
- Bin and cloth dirt collectors are environmentally friendlier but messier and harder to empty, while paper bags are more user-friendly but have ongoing costs.
- The following features are also useful — see the table for which models have them, if it's not stated here:
- **Variable suction/power:** A variable suction control on the wand and/or a variable power control (usually on the body of the cleaner) that allows you to vary the suction for more delicate jobs such as cleaning curtains.
- **Blower:** A godsend when it's time to blow up the airbed.
- **HEPA filter:** This stands for high-efficiency particulate air filter. It's an international standard for filters that trap minute particles. This type of filter can help if you have asthma or a dust allergy or sensitivity, but you have to clean or replace it regularly (about once a year) to ensure it works efficiently. The majority of models on test have a HEPA filter. In our previous test of cheap vacs (CHOICE, July 2003) less than half had a HEPA filter, so these are becoming more common, even on cheaper models.
- **Adjustable head height:** This feature is usually available on uprights only. It allows you to adjust the height of the bristles on the cleaning head to the length of the carpet pile. In this test, none of the vacuum heads is height-adjustable, but the LG turbo head has suction control adjustable for long or short carpet pile.
- **Telescopic wand:** This lets you adjust the wand to suit your height, so you shouldn't have to bend too much. All tested models except the HITACHI have one.

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.

LG SHARK V-CB574HTU

Price: \$249

GOOD POINTS

- Equal best in the test for dirt removal on carpet.
- Excellent for dirt removal from a hard floor.
- Fingertip control of variable power.
- HEPA filter.
- Telescopic wand.
- Very good reach from the power point.
- Dustbag is easy to install and remove.

BAD POINTS

- High-pitched sound can be annoying.
- No onboard storage for upholstery tool.



SAMSUNG CLEAN FORCE SC4040

Price: \$199

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for dirt removal from a hard floor.
- Variable power.
- HEPA filter.
- Telescopic wand.
- Very good reach from the power point.
- Lightweight.

BAD POINTS

- High-pitched sound can be annoying.
- No upholstery tool.
- The standard head left noticeable scratches on a hard floor, but the dedicated hard floor tool didn't.



VOLTA DOLPHIN SERIES II U9020

Price: \$149

BEST BUY

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for dirt removal from a hard floor.
- Variable power.
- Telescopic wand.
- HEPA filter.
- Very good reach from the power point.
- Dustbag is easy to install and remove.

BAD POINTS

- High-pitched sound can be annoying, though it was less so than most other tested models.
- Not as easy to manoeuvre as other models (the wheels on our tested sample didn't roll well).



Brand / model (in rank order)

LG Shark V-CB574HTU	81 / 83 (C)	67 / 73 (C)	97	100	72	83	74	Paper or cloth bag
SAMSUNG Clean Force SC4040	78	65	96 (D)	100 (D)	71	78	74	Paper or cloth bag
VOLTA Dolphin Series II U9020 (A)	78	64	99	100	68	77	72	Paper or cloth bag
WERTHEIM 4806	77	56	98	100	79	82	71	Paper bag
NILFISK Action A300	76	54	99 (D)	100 (D)	71	82	71	Paper bag
HOOVER Zoom H218G	75	56	99	100	71	77	65	Bin
PIRANHA Enviro C62217	75 / 77 (C)	55 / 62 (C)	99	100	67	77	73	Bin
GENIUS Bagless MC-801E-4A	73	56	97	100	75	70	79	Bin
AIRFLO SuperClean AFV 6001P	71	44	100	100	74	75	73	Bin
HITACHI CV-T885	70	67	94	100	69	50	70	Cloth bag
KAMBROOK Jaguar KVC15 (B)	68	59	81	30	72	78	75	Paper bag
SANYO SC185R	68	44	99	100	63	68	73	Cloth bag
TIFFANY VC202	68	51	98	40	71	73	76	Paper or cloth bag

PERFORMANCE

1 Overall score (%)	2 Dirt removal score from carpet (%)	3 Dirt removal score from hard floor (%)	4 Scratch test score (%)	5 Cleaning corners and edges score (%)	6 Ease of use score (%)	7 Noise (dB)
81 / 83 (C)	67 / 73 (C)	97	100	72	83	74
78	65	96 (D)	100 (D)	71	78	74
78	64	99	100	68	77	72
77	56	98	100	79	82	71
76	54	99 (D)	100 (D)	71	82	71
75	56	99	100	71	77	65
75 / 77 (C)	55 / 62 (C)	99	100	67	77	73
73	56	97	100	75	70	79
71	44	100	100	74	75	73
70	67	94	100	69	50	70
68	59	81	30	72	78	75
68	44	99	100	63	68	73
68	51	98	40	71	73	76

FEATURES

Dust collector
Paper or cloth bag
Paper or cloth bag
Paper or cloth bag
Paper bag
Paper bag
Bin
Bin
Bin
Bin
Cloth bag
Paper bag
Cloth bag
Paper or cloth bag

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ The **WERTHEIM**, **NILFISK**, **HOOVER**, **PIRANHA** and **GENIUS** are also worth considering, especially if you find them at a good price. None is as good on carpet as the top three, so they might be better suited to homes with predominantly hard floors.

■ The **HITACHI** cleans well, but it's very hard to use. Its standard head strongly resists being moved forward on carpet, and to keep it flat on the floor when moving it forward and backward you have to keep changing the angle of the wand. It has no telescopic wand and emptying the bag is messy.

■ The **KAMBROOK** doesn't clean hard floors as well as the others, and leaves noticeable scratches on the surface.

■ The **SANYO** and **AIRFLO** are poor at cleaning carpet, and the **SANYO** has no onboard accessory storage or upholstery tool.

■ The **TIFFANY** isn't good at cleaning carpet, and leaves noticeable scratches on hard floors.

For people with a disability

We assessed how suitable the vacuum cleaners are for someone with a disability, using guidelines from the Independent Living Centre (NSW).

None is ideal, but of the models in the *What to buy* list the **LG** and **SAMSUNG** would be the best choices. The main drawback with them is that their controls aren't good for a person with limited vision. However, the controls are simple and would be easy to learn to use. Note also that you'd need to be able to change the **SAMSUNG**'s head to avoid scratching hard floors.

All models have a retractable cord, crevice tool and dusting brush.

* Recommended or average retail price as advised by manufacturers in October/November 2005, unless otherwise indicated.

- (A) This model will have new graphics and packaging in 2006 but will otherwise be unchanged.
(B) Model discontinued in January 2006 (to be replaced by KVCo), but may still be available in some shops.
(C) Second number shows score when using turbo brush.
(D) Using the hard floor tool.
(E) Not for the upholstery tool.
(F) Variable power on the wand, rather than the body of the cleaner.
(G) Bin contents visible.
(H) Two years for the vacuum cleaner, three years for the motor.
(I) One year for parts and accessories, two years for the vacuum cleaner.
(K) The price we paid in August 2005.

1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Dirt removal from carpet: 35%
- Dirt removal from hard floor: 21%
- Scratch test (hard floor): 7%
- Cleaning corners and edges: 7%
- Ease of use: 30%

2 Dirt removal from carpet

We embedded 100 g of sand evenly into a section of carpet and vacuumed it to a set pattern and speed. The dirt collected was then weighed and recorded as a percentage of the dirt applied. We did this twice for each model and averaged the results.

While we also tested models with any turbo brush or power head they came with, we ranked them for comparison on their most basic and typical vacuum cleaner set-up.

3 Dirt removal from hard floors

The same test as for carpet, but using only half the test area and 50 g of sand, spread evenly over a section of medium-density fibreboard. The vacuum cleaner was set to hard-floor setting or a hard-floor tool was used when supplied. The percentage of dirt collected was measured.

4 Scratch test

The surface of a lacquered fibreboard panel was checked for scratch marks. The vacuum's hard floor setting or tool was used when there was one.

5 Cleaning corners and edges

Sand was spread into a 90° corner and vacuumed to see how well each cleaner was able to reach into corners and pick up dirt. This test was done on carpet using the standard cleaning head.

6 Ease of use

This is based on how easy the body of the cleaner is to manoeuvre and how easy it is to move the cleaning head over carpet and under low furniture; how difficult it is to empty and change the dirt collector; the operation of the controls; and how easy the supplied accessories are to use and store. We also considered use on stairs and the location of controls.

7 Noise

Measured at the user's position. Some models have a high-pitched sound that can be irritating, even though they're no louder than others.

8 Measured power

Higher power doesn't guarantee better cleaning performance — see page 35.

SPECIFICATIONS

8 Measured power at maximum speed (W)

1540	8.4	7.1	2	China	LG Electronics	249
1620	8.6	5.7	2 (H)	Korea	Samsung	199
1410	8.1	6.6	2	China	Electrolux	149
1600	8.0	6.3	2	China	Electrical Home Aids	229
1820	10.5	8.2	2	China	Nilfisk	199
1220	7.8	5.8	2	China	Hoover	159
1400	7.9	6.7	2	China	Funtastic	169
1900	11.0	7.3	1	China	World of Technologies	149
1500	7.9	7.1	2	China	Airflo	188 (K)
1280	8.3	5.5	2	Thailand	Hitachi	139
1660	8.1	6.3	1	China	Kambrook	170
1500	7.9	6.7	2 (J)	China	Sanyo	169
1330	7.6	6.2	1	China	GAF Control	99

0% helps Christmas credit blues

Are you suffering from Christmas credit blues after spending on presents and celebrations? If you're sure you can pay off the balance within the next few months, a credit card with a 0% balance transfer offer might be able to help.

All the cards in the table below offer 0% interest on a balance transferred from another credit card for an intro period of four to six months.

But beware: if you don't pay the balance within the intro period, interest will apply. The HSBC and NAB cards even apply the higher cash advance interest rate to the balance transfer amount instead of the standard rate. And check application and annual fees so that your interest saving isn't eaten away by the fees.

If you don't think you can pay off the balance within the intro period, use a low-interest credit card instead.



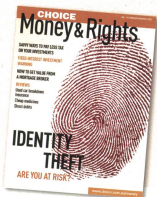
CREDIT CARDS WITH 0% BALANCE TRANSFER OFFER

Company / product (in alphabetical order)	Intro period (months)	Standard rate (%)	Same rate for cash advances (%)	Balance transfer reverts to standard rate (%)	0% intro rate also for purchases	Free days after statement date	Application fee (\$)	Ongoing annualised fee (\$)
ANZ Low Rate MasterCard	6	11.75	✓	✓		25		58
BANKWEST Zero MasterCard	4	12.99	19.99	✓	✓	25		
GE MONEY Coles Myer Source MasterCard (A)	6	18.50	✓	✓		32		
GE MONEY Go MasterCard (A)	6	17.50	27.50	✓		32	25	(A)
GE MONEY Low Rate MasterCard	6	10.99	✓	✓		25		58
HSBC Low Rate Visa	6	10.49	15.49	15.49		25		39
NAB Low Rate Visa	6	10.75	16.65	16.65		25		49
WIZARD Clear Advantage MasterCard	6	12.40	✓	✓		25		

(A) The Go MasterCard and Coles Myer Source MasterCard both have a store card attached, with its own interest rates, terms and conditions. Fees apply to store cards — for example, the Go MasterCard store card has a \$2.95 monthly account-keeping fee.

WANT MORE MONEY INFO?

CHOICE *Money & Rights* magazine is published six times a year and contains more information on money topics (and more consumer rights) than we could ever fit into CHOICE. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



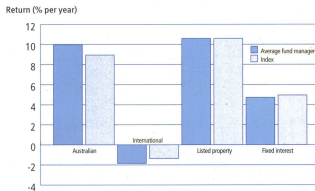
Invest in index funds and save

The next issue of CHOICE *Money & Rights* will be examining index funds as a cheap way to invest in Australia's top listed companies. With index funds, the fund manager chooses a portfolio of shares that match a benchmark index such as the S&P/ASX 100, then buys and holds those shares.

They usually provide similar returns to the index (before fees), and have cheaper management fees than actively managed funds. On average the performance of actively managed funds over the long term isn't very different from that of index returns — see below.

INDEX RETURNS AND ACTIVE FUNDS RETURNS COMPARED

Source: Morningstar, 31 May 1998 to 31 May 2005. Indices used: S&P/ASX 200 Acc Index, MSCI World Ex Aus Acc Index Gross Div (SA), S&P/ASX 200 Property Trusts Acc Index, UBSA Composite Bond Index 0+Years. Retail fund returns are after fees. Index returns have been adjusted for estimated index fund fees. Past performance is no guarantee of future performance.



CLEAN AT A PRICE?

Is it unrealistic to expect a dishwasher to be hard on dirt but easy on water and power?

IN A NUTSHELL

- Some dishwashers achieve energy and water efficiency at the expense of good washing and/or drying performance, but there are some good all-round models available.
- Of the 13 new models tested, only two made it into the What to buy selection — but one of them topped the list.

The only surprise in our latest test of conventional 12–15 place-setting dishwashers is that so many of the newly tested models seem to trade off high energy and/or water efficiency for lower scores for washing and drying.

With depleting fossil fuel reserves and water shortages a reality, it makes sense to consider the energy and water your appliances use. So do you have to trade off a saving on utilities with poorer washing and drying performance?

It isn't rocket science to work out why there's sometimes a trade-off — the machines simply have fewer resources to do the same job. However, some dishwashers can manage high scores across the board, so you don't have to put up with a machine that falls down on one aspect or another of performance.

The dishwashers in the *What to buy* list, right, are good all-rounders. But if your priorities mean you want to give more weight to any performance factor than we did to arrive at our overall score, just check the appropriate column for the best scores in the table on page 42.

WHAT TO BUY

12–15 PLACE SETTINGS

New MIELE G 1220 SC	\$1499
BLANCO BFDW6W	\$1330
WESTINGHOUSE SB915WJ	\$1059
MAYTAG Jetclean MJD2000AAW	\$1099
AEG Favorit 60820	\$1299
WESTINGHOUSE SB907WJ TEST BUY	\$849
WHIRLPOOL 6ADG7554WHM	\$1349
DISHLEX DX302WJ	\$949
HAIER HWD101WHX TEST BUY	\$599

6–9 PLACE SETTINGS

MIELE G 611-3SC Plus (slimline)	\$1499
BOSCH SRS5302AU (slimline)	\$1699
New FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer DS603WZ (drawer)	\$999

A Best Buy is a good performer whose purchase price and running cost combined are among the lowest in the test. Of the full-sized models, the **HAIER**, with its purchase price plus 10-year running costs totalling under \$1300, is an outstanding Best Buy. However, we don't yet have any reliability data for **HAIER** products. The **WESTINGHOUSE SB907WJ** is also good value for money, with a running cost plus purchase price of under \$1700.

The **FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer** is one of the top-performing compact dishwashers tested, but **F&P** dishwashers have a comparatively poor reliability record — see page 41. The main difference between the new single Dishdrawer and the previous model is that it takes six place settings instead of seven.

Profiles

The MIELE is one of only two newly tested models that made it into the *What to buy* list. For profiles of other models in the list (including the FISHER & PAYKEL single Dishdrawer DS603; the main change is six instead of seven place settings), see CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2005, July 2004 and April 2004, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on the appropriate date under 'dishwashers'.

MIELE G 1220 SC

Price: \$1499

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent drying performance.
- Very good washing score.
- Very good water efficiency score.
- Has a delayed-start function.
- Displays how much time the program has left to run.
- The top basket height is easy to adjust.
- Can fit tall glasses and large plates at the same time.

BAD POINTS

- Comparatively expensive.



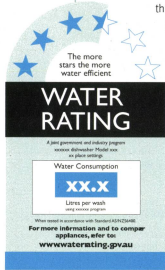
New water labelling

It's planned that from 1 July 2006, dishwashers and washing machines will have mandatory labels showing their water efficiency. The new labels will be blue and have a star rating like the energy rating stickers for electrical appliances.

The water efficiency labels with 'A' ratings currently on some machines aren't compulsory, so manufacturers may choose to label their more water-efficient machines but not their poorer performers. It's hoped the compulsory labelling system will give consumers a more accurate reading of a machine's water efficiency.

Another proposed condition of the new standard is that machines scoring less than one star in the water efficiency test will be issued with a 'failed to comply' sticker. This may encourage manufacturers to continue to develop machines that use less water.

It's still not clear if machines manufactured before 1 July 2006 will be required to have these stickers or not, and you're likely to see them appear on some machines before the deadline even though it's not mandatory. We'll keep you posted on further developments in this area.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

None of the other newly tested dishwashers made it into the *What to buy* list, with just average or lower overall scores.

- The MAYTAG MJD3005ANW rated well for drying, has a 'fast-wash' program and adjustable top basket height, and you can put tall glasses and large plates in at the same time. However, it scored at the low end of the range for wash performance and ease of use.
- The ELECTROLUX EX500, KLEENMAID DW24, ARISTON LL64 AUS and LG LD-14AW3 have handy features such as delayed start, adjustable basket heights and 'fast-wash' program, but they can't take tall glasses and large plates at the same time.
- The NEFF S44E33N1EU, MISTRAL MDW12M, FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer DD603, FISHER & PAYKEL Nemo DW681ES and BOSCH Classic Electronic SGS53E02AU also can't accommodate large plates and tall glasses at the same time.
- The SMEG SA 663 WH-1 can, but has one of the lowest washing scores, along with the BOSCH Classic Electronic, the FISHER & PAYKEL Nemo and the MISTRAL. The FISHER & PAYKEL Nemo also received a poor drying score, but was among the best for energy efficiency.

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre, NSW, assessed the dishwashers' suitability for people with a disability.

- If you're in a wheelchair, none of these dishwashers will be particularly easy to use. A single FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer, mounted at a suitable height, would be best.
- If you have problems with your hands, wrists or arms, look for easy pushbutton controls, a door that's easy to open and close and baskets and dispensers that slide in and out readily. Of the models in the latest test, the BOSCH Classic Electronic, LG LD-14AW3 and MIELE G 1220 SC would suit, although the detergent and rinse aid compartments aren't easy to close on the BOSCH and you'd need help with the LG's rinse aid plug. The FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer is also good, with an easy-to-hold cutlery basket; the KLEENMAID DW24 and the BLANCO BFDW6W from a previous test have an accessible detergent compartment, while the ELECTROLUX EX500 is easy to open and has a good grip on the upper basket.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked subscribers whether their dishwasher (bought in or after 1996) had needed repairing in the previous 12 months. Overall, one in seven had needed repairs, making dishwashers one of the most unreliable appliances in our survey. Even so, 79% of all respondents said they'd buy the same brand again.

■ Differences of 7% or more are meaningful. The numbers in brackets are the number of responses we received.

■ We don't yet have reliability data for the following brands — ARISTON, ELECTROLUX, HAIER, LG, MAYTAG, MISTRAL and NEFF.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

All dishwashers (6466)	85
Bosch (409)	92
Miele (628)	92
AEG (179)	90
Blanco (147)	89
Simpson (268)	89
Dishlex (1463)	86
Whirlpool (181)	86
Kleenmaid (225)	85
Westinghouse (331)	85
Asko (592)	81
Smeg (168)	80
Fisher & Paykel (1273)	79

The ASKO D3350's bottom basket handle is useful, and the AEG Favorit 60820 continues to be a good choice too.

■ If you're vision-impaired, look for controls that are large and widely spaced and have labels in a contrasting colour. Positive feedback such as indicator lights can also be helpful, as are baskets that have a contrasting colour to the background of the cabinet, making them easier to see. From previous tests the SIMPSON EZISET 52B870 and the BLANCO BFDW6W have good controls that are easy to operate. None of the latest tested models is particularly suitable.

■ For those with a cognitive impairment, simplicity is the key. The BOSCH Classic Electronic (pictured above) from the latest test, or the WESTINGHOUSE SB907, SIMPSON EZISET 52B870 and BOSCH SGS4332AU from previous tests are recommended here, as there's less risk of confusion with their controls than the others.



GENE ROSS

NOTES TO THE TABLE, OVERLEAF

1 Overall score

This following scores are weighted as follows to get the overall score:

- Washing performance: 30%
- Drying performance: 25%
- Ease of use: 15%
- Energy efficiency: 15%
- Water efficiency: 15%

2 Washing score

Using the 'normal' program, or the auto-sensing program on machines that have one, we assessed how well the dishwashers removed food such as spinach, egg yolk, baby cereal and tea stains that had been dried on overnight, without being rinsed first. This test is based on the current Australian standard.

3 Drying score

This reflects how dry the dishes were 30 minutes after the cycle finished. During that time the door was left closed.

4 Ease of use score

This reflects ease of loading and unloading, with a focus on awkward items such as large plates and tall glasses, as well as how versatile the baskets are and how easy it is to access and clean the filter.

5 Energy efficiency score/energy used

The score is based on the amount of energy used by the dishwasher on the tested program. The less energy used, the higher the score.

6 Water efficiency score/water used

This is based on the amount of water used by the dishwasher on the tested program. The less water used, the higher the score.

7 Noise

These are the maximum noise levels recorded during the tested program, measured 1 m away from the machine and 1 m from the ground. A measurement of over 50 dB means the dishwasher is relatively noisy, although they're all noisy enough to be aware of them while they're running.

8 Features

See the Jan/Feb 2004 issue (or go to www.choiceextra.com.au) for more on the features listed in the table. 'R' means the tines are removable, 'F' that they can be folded down.



9 Water connection

- H or C: You can connect the dishwasher to hot or cold water.
- C rec: The manufacturer recommends connection to a cold tap, and the dishwasher heats the water itself (all dishwashers have a heater).
- C only: You can only connect to a cold tap.

10 Type

- FW: Freestanding, with a worktop (can generally be built-in as well).
- BI: Built-in (mightn't have top or side panels).

Some models are also available semi-integrated (you can fit a front panel to the door to match the rest of your kitchen cupboard doors) or fully integrated (the whole front of the machine can match your kitchen, with the controls hidden inside the door). See the table footnotes for availability details.

11 Running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 15 cents per kWh for electricity and \$1 per 1000 L of water, running a full load using the 'normal' or auto-sensing cycle every day. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term difference between high and low water and energy usage — and you should be able to expect your dishwasher to last at least that long.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)

12 TO 15 PLACE SETTINGS

# MIELE G 1220 SC	84	80	96	88	67	87	1.41	16
BLANCO BFDW6W (A)	82	77	98	77	69	83	1.32	16
WESTINGHOUSE SB915WJ (B)	82	77	97	90	63	77	1.55	19
MAYTAG JetClean MUD2000AAW (C)	81	75	88	97	68	77	1.37	19
AEG Favorit 60820 (D)	80	72	96	100	64	66	1.51	23
WESTINGHOUSE SB907WJ (E)	80	75	94	90	63	75	1.53	20
WHIRLPOOL GADG7554WHM	80	75	79	88	82	81	0.91	17
DISHLEX DX302WJ (F)	79	70	90	95	63	76	1.54	19
HAIER HDW101VHX (G)	79	72	89	73	71	89	1.27	14
ASKO D3350 (H)	78	63	76	93	86	90	0.77	14
DISHLEX DX403WB (J)	78	78	92	98	56	58	1.78	26
SIMPSON Eziset 52B870WJ (K)	78	73	89	91	62	75	1.57	20
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso SB925J	78	78	94	90	57	57	1.75	26
# ELECTROLUX EX500	77	68	84	83	72	83	1.25	17
# KLEENMAID DW24X (L)	76	76	69	83	77	84	1.08	16
DISHLEX DX102WB (M)	76	78	74	95	61	70	1.59	21
# NEFF S4E33N1EU	76	80	71	85	67	77	1.42	19
# FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer DD603M (N)	75	68	84	83	63	77	1.54	19
# MAYTAG MJD3005ANW (C)	75	68	98	57	63	83	1.53	17
SIMPSON Eziset 52B850WJ (P)	75	75	74	95	60	69	1.64	22
WHIRLPOOL GADP5540WH (Q)	74	70	80	55	85	78	0.79	18
# LG LD 14AW3 (R)	73	68	81	68	71	77	1.28	19
# MISTRAL MDW12M	73	63	78	68	75	86	1.12	15
# ARISTON L64 AUS (S)	72	71	69	68	68	86	1.37	15
# SMEG SA 663 WH-1	70	67	78	60	72	73	1.23	20
# BOSCH Classic Electronic SG553E02AU	69	66	68	61	79	74	1.01	20
# FISHER & PAYKEL Nemo DW681ES WH (T)	66	65	44	70	87	81	0.73	17

6 TO 9 PLACE SETTINGS

MIELE G 611-3SC Plus (U)	77	74	82	73	84	69	0.63	16
BOSCH SR55302AU	76	80	93	68	61	62	1.21	18
# FISHER & PAYKEL Dishdrawer DS603WZ (V)	75	68	84	83	63	77	0.77	10
HAIER HDW6WH	68	69	92	33	64	66	0.75	11

All the models in the table have the basic white finish except the Kleenmaid DW24X, which has a stainless steel finish; Whirlpool GADG7554WHM, which is semi-integrated with a white control panel; and Fisher & Paykel Dishdrawer DD603M, which has an iridium finish (also see footnote N).

Newly tested models.

* "Normal" or auto-sense cycle.

** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in November 2005.

na Not applicable.

ns Not stated.

MEA Major Electrical Appliances.

(A) Also available as the BFDW6X in

stainless steel, \$1451; and as the BSDW6X, which has a stainless steel control panel, \$1402.

- (B) Also available as the SB915J with a black finish, \$1059; and the SB915J with a stainless steel finish, \$1159.
- (C) Also available as the MID3000AAW, which may be quieter and has extra features, \$1599. The MJD2000AAW and MJD3005ANW have been discontinued but will still be available in some shops.
- (D) Also available as the B6050U with a stainless steel finish and built-in, \$5599; and the semi-integrated B6050J with a stainless steel control panel, \$1488.
- (E) Also available as the SB907J with a

stainless steel finish, \$1009.

- (F) Also available as the DX302SJ with a stainless steel finish, \$1109; and DX302ISJ, semi-integrated with a stainless steel look control panel, \$1109.
- (G) Also available as the HDW101SSX with a stainless steel finish, \$749.
- (H) Also available as the D3350SS with a stainless steel finish, \$2099; and the semi-integrated D3350IT with a metal-grey control panel, \$2099.
- (I) Also available as the DX403WB with a stainless steel finish, \$1269.
- (K) Also available as the SB870SJ with a stainless steel finish, \$1009.
- (L) Also available as the DW24W in white, \$1799.

(M) Also available as the DX102SB with a stainless steel finish, \$949.

(N) Also available as the DD603J, an integrated model, \$1899; DD603SS with a stainless steel finish, \$1899; DD603WZ with a white control panel and zinc body, \$1699; and DD603MFD "Designer Series", \$2099.

(P) Also available as the D6030J with a stainless steel finish, \$899.

(Q) Also available as the GADP8540IX with a stainless steel finish, \$1399.

(R) The manufacturer tells us this model has been changed since our test, but the tested version may still be available in some shops.

	8 FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS						COSTS		
	Cycle time (minutes)*	Height-adjustable top basket	Foldable / removable times	Anti-flood device	Half-load option	Concealed element	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)	9 Water connection	Place settings	10 Type	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	11 Running cost (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$)**
135	✓		F, R	✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	2	Germany	Miele	822	1499
127	✓			✓	(W)	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	FW	2	France	MEA	724	1330
106	✓		F	✓		✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	2	Australia	Electrolux	849	1059
94	✓		F, R	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW / BI	2	Italy	Maytag	750	1099
112	✓		F	✓	(W)	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW	3	Germany	Andi Co	827	1299
106	✓		F	✓		✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	2	Australia	Electrolux	838	849
97	✓		F, R	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 56	H or C	12	BI	2	Germany	Whirlpool	476	1349
105	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 61	C rec	12	BI	2	Australia	Electrolux	843	949
133	✓			✓	✓		85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW	2	China	Haier Electronics	696	599
96			F	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	2	Sweden	Asko	423	1999
121	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	2	Australia	Electrolux	972	1159
102	✓			✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	2	Australia	Electrolux	861	899
124	✓		F	✓	(W)	✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	2	Australia	Electrolux	958	1269
100	✓		F	ns		✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	12	BI	2	ns	Electrolux	744	1429
104	✓			✓		✓	85 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	FW	5	France	Kleenmaid	647	1999
116	✓		F	✓		✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	1	Australia	Electrolux	872	829
113	✓			✓		✓	81 x 60 x 55	C rec	12	BI	4	Germany	Sampford & Staff	844	1499
125	na		R	ns	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	BI	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	913	1999
101	✓			✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	BI	ns	Italy	Maytag	899	1199
116	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	1	Australia	Electrolux	895	739
79						✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW / BI	2	Germany	Whirlpool	431	949
96	✓		F	ns	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	2	Korea	LG	767	949
115	✓		F	✓		✓	85 x 60 x 58	H or C	12	FW	3	China	Mistral	669	579
86	✓		F	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	2	Italy	Ariston	807	1499
137	✓		F	ns	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 59	C rec	14	FW	2	Italy	Omega	747	1655
85			F	ns		✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	2	Germany	Bosch	627	1049
73	✓			✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW	2	Germany	Fisher and Paykel	464	899
111	✓		F	✓		✓	85 x 45 x 60	H or C	9	FW	2	Germany	Miele	406	1499
94	✓		F	✓		✓	81 x 45 x 55	C only	9	FW	2	Germany	Bosch	730	1699
118	na		R	✓		✓	41 x 60 x 58	C rec	6	BI	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	560	999
122	✓						80 x 45 x 50	C rec	6	FW	2	China	Haier Electronics	451	799

(S) Also available as the LL64X in stainless steel, \$1599.

(T) Also available as DW 682ES SS in stainless steel, \$999.

(U) Also available as the G 611-3CJ Plus, a stainless steel or semi-integrated model with a white, black or stainless steel control panel, \$1699.

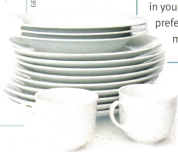
(V) Also available as the DS603J, an integrated model, \$1049; DS603SS with a stainless steel finish, \$1149; DS603M with an iridium finish, \$1199; and DS603MFD 'Designer Series', \$1299.

(W) Has load sensing and/or a dirt sensor, which optimises water, energy and time for every wash.

TO RINSE OR NOT TO RINSE?

A good dishwasher should be able to get the plates clean even if they've got food dried onto them. So if you use your machine every day, there's no need to rinse the dishes before you load them — and that's good news on the water-saving front. Alternatively, if you rinse them they're already quite clean and you can use a fast-wash program and save water and energy that way — useful if you don't run your machine every day but don't want a dishwasher full of smelly dishes.

GENE ROSS



MORE INFO

For a limited time you can use our interactive 'compare-a-dishwasher' tool on www.choiceextra.com.au. Just type in your dishwasher

preferences and it'll find the models that suit you.



Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, yes, no... maybe

The regulations governing country of origin labelling have been under review by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), and as a result the specific country of origin of fresh produce will now have to be stated on the product, rather than just the term 'imported', as is currently the case.

Fresh fruit, vegetables and deli items such as olives and sun-dried tomatoes will either have to be labelled or have a sign displayed near them showing the country of origin.

Even Australian produce will have to carry a country of origin label, and while fresh meat in general won't need to carry a claim as very little is imported, pork will, because a lot of it is.

For people who like to know where their food comes from, this is an improvement on the current situation. However, we'd like to have seen a further tightening of the 'Made in Australia' criteria for packaged foods.

Healthy snacks for kids?

Only a quarter of the 100 kids' lunchbox snacks we looked at a year ago met all CHOICE's healthy nutrition criteria (CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2005). So we're very interested in the new 'nutritious snacks' criteria developed for **UNCLE TOBYS** by the National Centre of Excellence in Functional Foods at the University of Wollongong.

To win 'gold' under these criteria, one serve of the snack product must have less than 600 kJ, less than 2 g saturated fat and less than 300 mg sodium. The product must also meet at least one of three other nutrition criteria that specify minimum levels of fibre, whole grains, folate and minerals (such as calcium, iron, magnesium and zinc). The 'silver' criteria allow a little more saturated fat and sodium; 'bronze' allows unlimited saturated fat and sodium as long as at least one of the other nutrition criteria is met.

While the gold and silver criteria set sensible limits for kilojoules and saturated fat, we're disappointed that:

- **There's no limit to how much sugar's allowed.** While fruit and milk-based ingredients may

YOU SAY BUK CHOY...

We're lucky to have a great range of Asian vegies available to us these days, but do you find that one greengrocer's buk choy looks like another's choy sum? And what's the difference between pak choy and gai choy?

Help is on the way, thanks to a new national naming system that will standardise names for 14 Asian vegetables. It'll be introduced in NSW initially, but will be followed by other states. Some of the names that have been agreed upon by organisations including the NSW Department of Primary Industries, supermarkets and the vegetable industry are buk choy, pak choy, choy sum, wombok and gai lan.



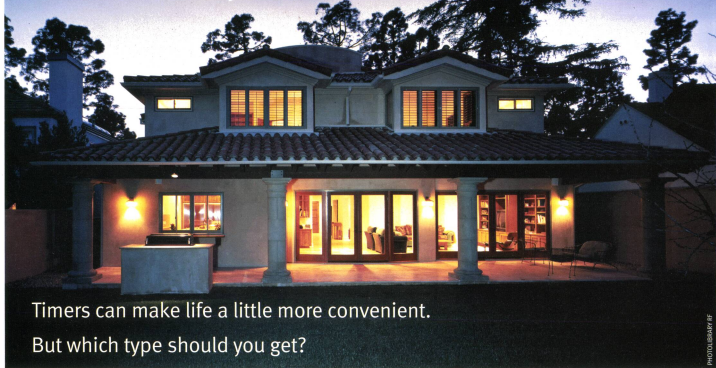
contribute some sugars, foods high in added sugars often have limited nutritional value, and if they stick to kids' teeth they can encourage decay. **UNCLE TOBYS Fruit Twists** meet the 'gold' criteria but are 42% sugars (very little of it fructose from fruit) — definitely not what we'd call a healthy snack.

■ **The criteria allow too much sodium.** This is associated with raised blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, so it's important not to have too much whatever your age. A snack that meets the 'gold'

criterion could provide more than 10% of the maximum recommended daily intake for an adult — and the snacks are for children, who shouldn't be eating as much. If your kids have sandwiches in their lunchbox they'll already have had a hefty slug of sodium from the bread and possibly the fillings.

While a step in the right direction, CHOICE thinks the **UNCLE TOBYS** 'nutritious snacks' criteria could be overstating how healthy the company's foods really are, awarding gold, silver or bronze to sugary and salty snacks that aren't *that* good for kids.

Lights on, but nobody's home



Timers can make life a little more convenient.
But which type should you get?

A power timer can automatically switch lights and electrical appliances on and off at the times you want: you simply program the timer (the real time and the desired on/off settings), plug it into a power point and the appliance into the timer.

You can probably think of a variety of uses, but some examples are:

- On a warm summer night the cooling breeze of a fan might help you fall asleep, but a timer can switch it off later when it would become too cold.
- In winter, it can switch on your electric blanket half an hour before you usually go to bed, instead of you having to remember to do it yourself.
- If you go on holiday, timers can switch on lights at certain times of the day, so your house looks lived in.

TIMER TYPES

There are two main types — rotary and electronic.

■ **Rotary** timers come in three different versions. They're all mechanical — they have a small motor that rotates a disc or ring (for example, one rotation every 24 hours). You set the rotating disc or ring to the current time, then program on and off actions by inserting pins, sliding small segments or pointing

arrows at the desired times. Once the rotating disc or ring reaches your settings, it'll trigger the on or off action.

The small pins used on some models can easily get lost, and models using arrows usually only allow one on and one off action, which may not be enough for your requirements.

Rotary timers come in 24-hour and seven-day versions. The 24-hour ones usually allow you to set times in 15–30 minute intervals, and the appliance or light will be switched on and off at the same time each day. The seven-day models have much longer time intervals (the shortest in our test was 105 minutes), but you can program different times on different days.

One disadvantage of all rotary timers is that they stop when there's a power failure. So you'll have to reset the real time or your programming will be out by the length of the power failure.

■ **Electronic:** As the name suggests, these measure time electronically. They also have a back-up battery, which takes over in case of a power failure — so they'll keep the time, and your appliance will keep switching on and off as programmed once the power is back on.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **On test:** 21 rotary and electronic power timers costing between \$5 and \$40, for accuracy and ease of use.
- **Most are fairly accurate and quite easy to use** — which type you choose depends on what you want to use the timer for.
- **Electronic models tend to be more expensive, but usually have more programming options and features.**

PHOTO LIBRARY RF

They have a digital display, and you program them using a keypad. They usually allow more flexible programming than rotary timers — for example, most let you set times in one-minute intervals, and the programming of 'time groups' such as any individual day of the week, all days of the week, all weekdays, or weekends.

And all those we tested have a random mode in which the timer will switch an appliance or light on and off randomly throughout the evening, say.

DID THEY WORK?

■ The majority of the tested timers triggered the on/off actions on average within four minutes of the programmed times. This should be accurate enough for most purposes, but if accuracy down to a few seconds is important, go for those that scored 99% or 100% for performance in the table. All electronic models were very accurate, keeping track of time almost to the second; some rotary models also managed this.

■ The HPM D812WEEK and RINGGRIP RST7 (both rotary seven-day models) were much less accurate: on average, they were out by about half an hour or more.

■ The timers are generally easy to use. However, there are good and bad examples for all types — see the scores in the table for a comparison. ■

WHAT TO BUY

In terms of accuracy, any model down to the HPM D817/2 in the table is worth considering. (However, the HPM D817/2 itself was comparatively hard to use, scoring only 43% for this. All the other models ranged from 65–95% for ease of use.) Which one's for you depends on what you want to use it for. We've listed the highest-scoring models of each type below for easy reference.

■ Rotary timers

If you want a light or an appliance to switch on and off at the same time each day, almost any of the 24-hour rotary models will do the job.

The tested models with arrows on a rotating ring only allow one on and one off switch per day. Pin timers allow more, but if you require a lot of switches (say 20 or more), you need a model that uses sliding segments for programming, or an electronic one.

Segment model

CLICK CST24 \$6.05–\$7.15

Pin model

KAMBROOK KMT90 \$8.00–\$10.00

Arrow model

ARLEC PC899 \$9.00–\$15.50

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			4 FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS					
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Performance score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Random	Battery back-up	Maximum time interval (days)	Minimum time interval (min)	5 Possible on or off actions	Controls	Type	Warranty (years)
CLICK CST24	97	99	95			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	2
ARLEC PC707 (A)	95	99	90			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	1
HPM D809 (B)	95	99	88			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	5
HPM D818	93	98	85			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	5
KAMBROOK KMT90	93	96	88			1	30	14	Pins	Rotary	1
KAMBROOK KMT200	93	95	90			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	1
HPM D812COUNT (C)	92	94	90			(C)	(D)	(C)	Arrow	Rotary	5
RINGGRIP RETP	92	100	80	✓	✓	7	1	12	Keypad	Electronic	2
KAMBROOK KET99	91	100	78	✓	✓	7	1	112	Keypad	Electronic	1
RINGGRIP RET1	91	99	78	✓	✓	7	1	12	Keypad	Electronic	3
HPM D810/2	90	87	95			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	5
ARLEC PC717	88	95	78			1	15	96	Segments	Rotary	1
RINGGRIP RCT24	85	87	83			1	30	12	Pins	Rotary	3
ARLEC PC844	83	89	75			1	30	8	Pins	Rotary	1
ARLEC PC899	83	81	85			1	15	2	Arrows	Rotary	1
ARLEC PC855	78	84	70			1	15	8	Pins	Rotary	1
HPM D817/2	77	100	43	✓	✓	7	1	180	Keypad	Electronic	1
HPM D819	65	51	85			1	15 (E)	2	Arrows	Rotary	5
CLICK CST7	62	50	80			7	120	84	Segments	Rotary	2
HPM D812WEEK	38	20	65			7	105	96	Segments	Rotary	5
RINGGRIP RST7	38	20	65			7	210	48	Segments	Rotary	3

If you want to program different times on different days, the **CLICK CST7** (\$6.05–\$7.20) is the only seven-day rotary timer with reasonable accuracy (an average error of four minutes), but all the electronic seven-day timers were more accurate.

Electronic timers

These are all very accurate, but usually pricier than rotary models. They allow a lot more programming flexibility, but a couple of them are comparatively less easy to use — check the table for details.

RINGGRIP RETP \$19.90–\$29.95

Countdown timer

If switching an appliance off after up to two hours is exactly what you need, the **HPM D812COUNT** (about \$13) may be your timer — all it does is count down from two hours or less.



CLICK CST4



CLICK CST7



ARLEC PC89g



KAMBROOK
KM79g



HPM
D812COUNT



RINGGRIP
RETP

ALL THE MODELS

- Are made in China.
- Plug into a normal power point.
- Can handle up to 2400 W of heating and lighting, but some have lower limits for motor-driven appliances — check the instructions.

- (A) Also available in a twin-pack, PC708.
(B) Replaced by the D809/1, which has a one-year warranty and a new socket design that doesn't block adjacent power outlets.
(C) Two-hour countdown timer only. Replaced by D812COUNT4, which is a four-hour countdown timer, but stock of the two-hour version may still be available.
(D) 10 seconds.
(E) Minimum 'off' time; minimum 'on' time is 45 minutes.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%).

2 Performance score

We set the timers to switch on and off twice a day for seven days, and calculated the average absolute error. Two models had an average error of

about half an hour or more, which we think is poor, so we scored them 20%.

3 Ease of use score

We assessed how easy it is to set the real time and on and off times, the use of controls, and the stability of the timers in the power point.

4 Features

- Random:** Can switch on/off at random times, rather than times set by the user.
- Battery back-up:** Maintains the correct on/off times after a power cut.

5 Number of possible on or off actions

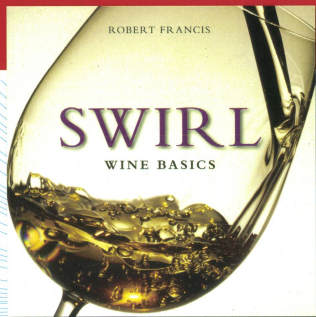
Two of the tested timers only allow one on and one off action, but that may be all you need. Most provide more options, though you're unlikely to need the 96 or more offered by many. Some of the pin models theoretically allow more on/off actions but are limited by the number of pins they come with — that's the number in the table.

6 Price range

Many of the timers don't have a recommended retail price, and a price survey found large variations for most models. The range shown is based on our price survey in Melbourne and Sydney in November 2005. Shop around!

Price range (\$)

- 5.05–7.15
- 7.50–10.00
- 5.50–14.95
- 2.00–26.95
- 8.00–10.00
- 5.00
- 2.95–13.00
- 9.90–29.95
- 4.95–40.00
- 1.00–32.00
- 7.45–13.75
- 39.25–39.35
- 5.00–10.50
- 7.95–15.50
- 9.00–15.50
- 14.00–23.50
- 14.50–31.50
- 12.80–14.95
- 6.05–7.20
- 10.00–21.00
- 7.00–22.00



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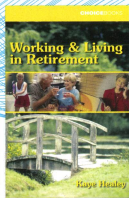
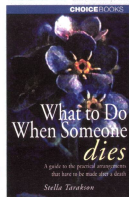
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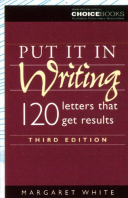
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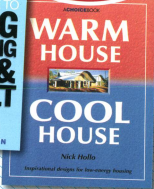
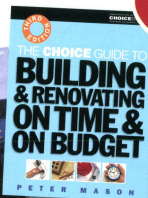
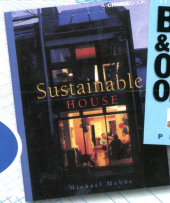
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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on (02) 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

SPARKLERS: PJ SAS Trading has recalled **Big Splash Sparklers**, 16-piece pack, sold as a two-pack with product code 32648 in Queensland. **The problem:** Testing by the Queensland Department of Fair Trading has found them to be unsafe. **What to do:** Stop using them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (02) 9602 5444.

FOOD: Uncle Tobys has recalled **Plus Sultanas n Bran**, 850 g cardboard box, best-before dates 260606 and 270606. **The problem:** It contains peanuts, which aren't declared on the label. **What to do:** Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to peanuts. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 641 276, or email cac@uncletobys.com.au.

FOOD: Eatslim has recalled **SureSlim Wellness Clinic Mild Curry Spices** and **Pureblends Gourmet Herbs and Spices Mild Monsoon Curry Spice Blend**, best-before dates up to 30 June 2007, sold in a 60 g cardboard packet. The SureSlim product was sold nationally, while the Pureblends blend was sold in NSW, SA, Victoria and WA. **The problem:** They contain gluten, which isn't declared on the label. **What to do:** Don't eat them if you have an allergy or intolerance to gluten. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (02) 4367 4814.

TOYS: Coles Myer Supermarkets has recalled **You'll Love Coles Beach Boat set, Truck and Boat set, Tool set, Wheel Barrow set and Dump Truck set**, sold from 10 October 2005 in all states except Tasmania. **The problem:** Small pieces may break off and pose a choking hazard for young children. **What to do:** Remove them from the reach of young children. Return them to your nearest store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 061 562.

COMPUTER BATTERY: HP has recalled **battery packs** for use in certain **HP and Compaq notebook computers**, sold between March 2004 and May 2005. The batteries were sold with the following notebooks (the product number can be found on the bottom right-hand corner of the screen).

HP Pavilion	HP Pavilion (cont'd)	Compaq Presario	HP Compaq	Compaq Evo
dv7000	ze4700	1100	nc6000	N1010v
dx4000	ze4800	X4000	nx9100	N1050v
dx5000	ze5155	R3000	nx5000	
dx7000	ze5200	V1000	9000	
z88100	ze5300	2500	nx9008	
ze4100	ze5400	X6100	nw8000	
ze4100/xt1xx	ze5500	2100	nx9010	
4200	ze5600	X5000	nx9005	
ze4200	ze5700	R3200	nc8000	
ze4300	ze5200		nx9105	
ze4400	ze5000		nx6130	
ze4500	ze5200		9005	
ze4600				

The problem: An internal short in the battery may lead to overheating, the emission of smoke or melting and charring of the battery pack and/or computer, possibly leading to a fire hazard.

What to do: If your computer is affected, shut it down immediately and remove the battery pack. To arrange for a replacement call 131 047, or if you have access to another computer go to www.hp.com/support/BatteryReplacement.

MEDICATION: Wyeth has recalled **Enbrel etanercept (rch)** 25 mg powder for injection vial and dilutant syringe kit, Aust R 90456/Aust R 76410, batch numbers 14419, 14420, 14533, 14874, 14937, 15585, 15592, 17547 and 17553. **The problem:** The plastic casing may be cracked, causing a loss of sterility. **What to do:** Call 1800 500 498 for more information.

CAR ACCESSORIES: **Anti Theft Car Alarms** has recalled **remote alarms, remote immobilisers and upgrade alarms programmed with blinker confirmation**, with the following PCB part numbers: all A4KA issue 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; all A4KR issue 1, 3; and all A4KU issue 1, 3, 4.

The problem: A device in the security system may malfunction and overheat. **What to do:** Lock your vehicle manually until it's been inspected. Contact the place of purchase to arrange for inspection and rectification if required.

BATTERY: Nikon has recalled certain **Nikon EN-EL3 lithium-ion rechargeable batteries** for Nikon digital SLR cameras, sold in Australia between August 2004 and October 2005. The batteries were sold with Nikon D100, D70 and D50 cameras, or as individual batteries. The product name and production lot number can be found on the seal on the bottom of the battery. Affected batteries have a production lot number beginning with 4A4, 46A, 47A, 48A, 49A, 4AA, 4BA or 4CA. **The problem:** The battery may overheat, leading to deformation or a possible fire.

What to do: Remove the battery from your camera. For more information go to www.maxwell.com.au/support/batteryreplacement.htm, email recall@maxwell.com.au, or call 1800 810 259, weekdays 9 am to 4:30 pm AEST.

CHAINSAW: Super Cheap Auto has recalled **SuperWorks 2 Stroke Petrol Chainsaw**, model number PLU 104252, sold in Queensland. **The problem:** An e-cup securing the retaining pin on the chain brake may not have been installed. **What to do:** Return it to your nearest Super Cheap Auto store for inspection and fitting of the missing clip.

FOOD PROCESSOR: Guthy-Renker has recalled the **Ultimate Chopper Food Processor**, manufactured between November 2004 and September 2005. **The problem:** The interlock assembly may fail, meaning the food processor can work without the lid being fitted. The blade assembly may show signs of cracks, breakage or significant wear.

What to do: Stop using it. Call 1800 500 903 for further instructions.

CANDLE: Bevilles Jewellers has recalled **Coffee Bean Candles**, containing decorative coffee beans and sold since 31 August 2005 in NSW, SA and Victoria. **The problem:** The coffee beans may explode and cause sparks when heated by the candle flame. **What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

GAS REGULATOR: **Welding Guns of Australia** has recalled **Uni-flame acetylene gas regulator**, imported and sold from 7 September 2005 to 14 October 2005. They were sold individually and as part of the Uni-flame oxy/acetylene kit. **The problem:** They're fitted with a copper crush washer that may create explosive acetylides. **What to do:** Contact your gas distributor for further information.

VEHICLE: Mitsubishi has recalled **ZE and ZF Outlander vehicles**, fitted with genuine accessory carpet floor mats, and with a VIN range between JMFRCU4W3J000201 and JMFRCU5W6J000451, built between December 2003 and July 2005 inclusive. **The problem:** The front edge of the floor mat overlaps the arc of travel of the accelerator pedal, which could cause interference at the full throttle position and possible locking of the throttle.

What to do: Owners will be contacted by mail, or for more information call 1300 553 349.

aboutchoice

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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The prize for the best entry goes to K Buntrock. Thanks also to L & P Baxter, D Fajerman, R Gronow, D Peters and I Taylor for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.



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